

THE SURPRISINGLY FANTASTIC SCRIPT:
IMAGINATIVE IMMATERIAL LABOR, "MULTTTUDINOUS" SCREENWRITING,
AND GENRE INNOVATION WITHIN PEAK TV

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In a city embraced by visiting neighbors from other parts of the Midwest for its low-taxed beer, fireworks, tires, and porn, I sit in a student dormitory at Marquette University, near the close of the Science Fiction Research Association conference where I have just presented a paper on Disney's production relations, looking down through my window at the spaghetti tangle of crisscrossing freeways, marveling on what an odd journey it has been. Milwaukee seems a fitting place in which to end my 25-year journey towards researching and authoring a dissertation that has occupied almost half my life. The Wisconsin city feels simultaneously industrial and poor, messy and hopeful, unsure of the future yet solidly grounded in a past marked by both capital and labor. In other words, it resembles me. The urban landscape is being torn down, emptied out for just-over-the-horizon gentrification, yet flowered with the most beautiful of European-American architecture constructed sturdily by early-twentieth-century immigrant workers. As if uncertain of the genre language through which to articulate these discordant historical textures and temporalities, so as to represent the unrepresentable. As if to ask, how can I express something as huge as a multitude?

This is a personal project that I have resided with for a long time and that I struggled to understand for many years and across multiple disciplines until I found the proper genre syntax. Even then, I am almost certain that the experiment has failed linguistically and even empirically...but nonetheless experience a deep rush of satisfaction as I put to bed this weird snarl of ideas, facts, reflections. *Something has been said, in some imperfect way, that endeavors some kind of impact*—I think. Sometimes, I'm not a very good writer.

Or perhaps words are the weakest of all worldly energies, which is why I place so much trust in the audiovisual.

At any rate: I am grateful to my ancestors from Yamaguchi and Kumamoto, whose creativity and workaholism, whose skepticism and spirituality, whose effortful and troubled ethics I feel in my Aikidō "one-point" (gut) every day, especially my parents who were both alive when I started on this path and who no doubt shake their heads and smile, thinking *how typical* of me to end it in this inimitable, idiosyncratic way. As I finish this, I am struck by a memory of my grandmother Sadako, my mother's mother, who advised me near her death that "jinsei wa benkyō," life is to be learned, which it most certainly is. I am also indebted to my husband's family from Gushikawa and Yamaguchi for their work and love and their

durable, working-class sense of right and wrong that my own clans have often historically lacked, especially to Nobuko, my mother-in-law.

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Despite the data and the theory, this is essentially a current memoir about my life.
And so it's for Dougy and Yaya and for Kenrick, of course.

ABSTRACT

Analyzing the production relations between television writers, producers, and showrunners, this project conceptualizes connections between diversity labor and the teleplay form, focusing on the negotiated nature of script authorship during the digital era of Peak TV. To map structures of immaterial labor within the global production of corporate fantasy, reposition televisual fantasy as a spiritual storytelling mode of community expression rather than its default definition as a commercial genre, and interrogate the corporate-media conceptualization of “innovation” as individualistic white-male achievement, I integrate economic lessons from teleplay writers’ script development, entertainment news, industry folklore, and my own class history, with life stories of African American, indigenous, LGBTQ, immigrant, and female writers/producers. I conclude that to enrich their exchange value in racialized and gendered labor markets while creating quality TV, teleplay writers from marginalized “multitudinous” groups deploy hybridized genre tactics innovatively by pairing commercial sensibilities of form with cultural knowledges grounded in community.

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INTRODUCTION. POSE-ING QUESTIONS ON THE PRODUCTION RELATIONS OF PEAK TV

Nationally respected male-to-female (MTF) transgender celebrity who also happens to be a Native Hawaiian, African American, and haole “local girl” educated at Farrington High School and the University of Hawai‘i-Mānoa, Janet Mock recently added three more job titles to her impressive list of occupations that includes journalist, memoirist, media activist, and actress. As of this summer, she is a writer, director, and producer of the prime-time *Pose* (2018), a scripted series which presents transgender women and cisgender gay male characters of diverse racial and class backgrounds interacting in the ball culture scene of 1980s New York City against the backdrop of the Reagan-era economic rise of Donald Trump. Gay and lesbian entertainment-industry power-players Ryan Murphy and Nina Jacobson, the show’s cisgender executive producers, hired Mock along with white MTF transgender musician and singer Our Lady J for *Pose*’s writing and producing staff, to create stories about their community for the edgy yet commercial FX network.

But for me, the first show scripted by fellow Honolulu-born homegirl Mock is disappointing. The previous episode (“Access,” S1E2, airdate 06/10/18) had been written by the series’ showrunning team, Murphy and his producing partner Brad Falchuk along with their co-executive producer, Steven Canals who came up with the show’s original premise then developed it with Falchuk. That earlier episode had demonstrated all kinds of excellence and sophistication in dramatic writing, continuing to establish the series’ fairy-tale-like language and magical landscape which these executive producers had started to lay down in the pilot. *Pose* is set in Manhattan’s industrial harbor area where trans women hook “straight” professional customers from the executive and managerial classes and also where young gay men of all backgrounds practice their dance moves. Its stories transpire too at the fabulous evening balls where these women show off their sartorial and performative wit via competitive catwalks and raucous call-and-response audience commentary. This highly stylized story world of the dock area and the balls gets articulated as a lightly fantastic safe space to which trans women and queer men from all over the country flock so that they can dare to love, hope, and dream in spite of an overtly homophobic US society. That episode authored by Murphy, Falchuk, and Canals performs all kinds of storytelling acrobatics to achieve a fabulist sense of wonder for these journeying characters many of whom sojourn

from outside the city to be embraced by their new accepting families of the ball culture and its various houses. Through moments of quiet spectacle within this fabulist bubble of the city's LGBTQ world, they are allowed to imagine sharing their lives together, to flirt, fuck, perform, fight, romance, and plan for meaningful and humane futures alongside other community members, with relative freedom as they lend each other support even in the face of the terrifying HIV virus.

However, in contrast with that episode, for the installment titled "Giving and Receiving" (S1E4, airdate 06/17/18), co-written by Mock and Our Lady J, the executive producers assign a very simple story for the newbie writers. It's Janet Mock's first screenplay ever, and Our Lady J has been working for about two years as a new writer on the show *Transparent* (Amazon Studios, 2014-present), becoming the first trans female scripter for that transgender-themed scripted series. Structured by a neat set of parallel plots that are each further divided into scenes of generally equal length, this episode of *Pose* does not include the extended dramatic sequences or complex narrative structures previously played out on the show. Instead, the narrative intercuts efficiently between these subplots to illustrate how Christmas is celebrated by trans and gay characters from different class backgrounds—whom we've already met and whose personal stakes in participating in NYC LGBTQ life we've earlier come to understand in previous episodes. It's a very straightforward, perfunctory, and choppy, a no frills assignment which initially makes me upset, because Janet Mock and Our Lady J are actually the first trans writers to script the series; Murphy is a gay cisgender male, his partner Falchuk straight, and Canals also a gay cisgender man. Why are they giving the trans screenwriters this standalone episode, also called a breather episode, which is not connected to the longer story arcs which viewers of the current age of Peak TV love so much due to their addicting quality and their momentum within larger stakes of the show? This is not a prestige assignment, I tell myself.

I am very critical, until I realize that this is what creative writing looks like within a capitalist industrial setting. As a screenwriter myself and former business journalist, I know that for scripted TV shows in an industry run by corporate mass media, you have to first create the work project, which Murphy and Falchuk do by using producing skills to say "Yes" to investing their production companies' resources to support their showrunning newbie partner Canals, the LatinX-African American creator of *Pose* who's a gay man from the Bronx on whose life the introductory point-of-view character (who's a cisgender gay

black-Latino dancer) is partly based; and then by bringing influential film/TV producer Jacobson on board. Then as teleplay writers who are also businessmen cognizant of product marketing directives, Murphy, Falchuk, and Canals secure the project's commercial success by personally co-authoring the first two episodes in order to carve out the basic story world and its televisual language within the existing TV market. In process, they do not just establish the show's audiovisual signature artistically, but commercially brand its deployment of a particular thematic mix of **fantasy**—such the ball culture, the exaggerated romantic dates and heightened sex-and-love dramas to which *Pose*'s trans female and gay characters are treated, and the LGBTQ-safe social landscape of love and support—and **reality**, including the advent of AIDS, the working-class and poor economic conditions in which most of the characters live that forces them into different levels of sex work, the racism and homophobia they still encounter among strangers and family, and the then-unquestioned discrimination within the LGBTQ community against trans women. This fantasy-reality genre blend places the show in a television market competing against 500 other series, and it performs well with critics—visually stunning, politically fierce, darkly funny, and gently tragic, it garners overwhelmingly positive reviews. To survive the ratings rat race, Murphy and Falchuk (with Jacobson), as managers within the production relations of contemporary Peak TV, perform diversity-centered labor force recruitment, training, job evaluation, and promotion of the screenwriters employed on *Pose*'s staff. This is what a progressive industrial pedagogy of creative writing looks like: how it manages the labor of Janet Mock and Our Lady J, two writers relatively unfamiliar with the screenplay form, as well as for Canals, a first-time showrunner.

So realizing this, and reflecting on my own goal to produce television someday, I reconsider how the show's work assignments and occupational statuses have been distributed so far, and note that Native Hawaiian, African American, haole writer from Hawai'i Janet Mock, yes, is first assigned that paired writing job for the relatively "filler" Christmas episode with Our Lady J, but then, in *Pose*'s next episode, authors her own teleplay solo, and two episodes after that, directs her first-ever TV show which she also co-writes with Murphy ("Love is the Message," S1E6, airdate 07/08/18). I can tell that with each succeeding show in the eight-episode summer series, Mock has gotten better and better writing work, especially as she seems to have garnered the major episodes dramatizing the effect of the AIDS crisis on the characters, the most meaty writing assignments. On top of

that, the degree of her televisual authorship—i.e. her creative autonomy and workplace authority—has expanded because she gradually gets to direct in addition to writing. The original show creator Canals explains Ryan Murphy’s pedagogical philosophy which I think not only applies to his mentorship of that new showrunner but also Murphy’s training and promotion of Mock as a young TV producer who’s learning the ropes in writing and directing. The first-time co-executive producer says:

Ryan (Murphy) ... wants to live in a world where everyone is treated the same; however, he recognizes we can’t have equality without equity. Providing everyone with the tools they need to be successful is key. (Canals)

Mock takes advantage of these tools by unveiling the heart of ballroom culture’s worldview in her first solo episode as a writer, “The Fever” (S1E5, airdate 06/24/18). In the story world, a bratty young drag queen announces, “This is ballroom. Categories were created so that we can live out our fantasies. We get to be who we want to be,” only to be corrected by her house mother, who explains their community’s notion of fantasy v. reality: “If you’re going to serve up a look, it must be suited to you. It must be streamlined and flattering. Most of all, it must be REAL... (it) need(s) to convince a skeptical audience *searching for falsities*.” In this vulnerable community for which the boundary between fantasy and reality is not defined in terms of socially constructed “facts” (e.g., whether one is born a cisgender woman or not) but rather in terms of the ability to sense the truth despite heteronormative ideology, straight people’s cultural lies, and other societal gender binaries, this distinction, this fantasy practice, is critical to survival.

My account of Janet Mock’s writing work in *Pose* demonstrates three key elements that guided the methodology for this dissertation:

First: Creative labor, that is, occupational issues of workplace authority, creative autonomy, and job satisfaction (and/or its opposite, job safety, especially given what we know about Hollywood as a toxic workplace for creative labor, via recent discussion of #MeToo and #TimesUp), in the context of historically specific production relations and occupational hierarchies;

Second: Fantastic genre as a method for community expression, specifically, spiritual and ethical communication based on group traditions of cultural storytelling & other moral-aesthetic forms;

And third: and the transmedial politics of “scripted-narrative” production within the

global entertainment industry. By “transmedial,” I am including of course old media such as music where Our Lady J was originally trained and print non-fiction where Mock first made her mark, but also the dazzling, often confusing choices of information and communication technology (ICT) platforms in this digital era, each of which dictates its own range of commercial formats.

The relationship between these three factors—creative labor, fantastic genre, and the transmedial politics of production—has been on my mind for a long time, probably programmed from birth by parents who had loved movies and TV. Ida Lupino, my namesake, was an English actress who had originally come to classical Hollywood at the start of its sound era. Lupino is well remembered within the feminist screen history of Hollywood creative-labor: she was the first woman director in the very institutionalized postwar studio system, beginning her helming work in the 1950s, where the term “Hollywood production” meant a highly regimented and well-tested assembly line of creative labor slotted into very specific occupational roles. Behind the camera, she beat the industry’s newly established glass ceilings, by directing and producing eight studio films, but more important, serving as director of over 100 TV episodes, almost all for genre-specific shows—because the prestigious theatrical television dramas (usually realistic in genre) were usually only assigned to male directors. She helmed episodes of Westerns, domestic comedies, supernatural stories, mysteries, and gangster tales, becoming the only female director of the *Twilight Zone*.

I’ve often wondered why I am named after this person whose very life story recalls questions about transmedia employment structures—why did she get so much work directing TV compared to her paltry 8 movies? She’s helped me understand creative labor’s horizontal mobility in the entertainment industry, as I asked myself why she had to juggle directing film, directing TV, and performance, all the way up to the last decades of her life? Her history has made me speculate about how even in a factory system, creative workers’ sociocultural backgrounds such as gender might inform their work’s content. For example, I found it interesting that as the only female studio director of Hollywood’s high-modernist period, Lupino often mixed feminist content with masculinist storytelling modes; for instance, presenting women’s family stories, rape narratives, etc., through noir and crime modes? She made me aware of genre versatility, as she had to be so flexible, jumping from narrative mode to narrative mode, as a television director. As a different kind of Ida born into another media milieu, these inquiries have followed me all my life.

Ten years ago, these questions came to bear when I closely followed online news reports of the 2007-2008 Writers Guild of America strike, in part a struggle between Hollywood studios and creative-industry labor to acknowledge screenwriting work in new-media ICTs. The journalistic accounts illustrated something so fascinating that I quit my day job to explore these issues in my dissertation.

The central question of this project is: How does diversity within scripted television's labor relations reflect community expression and agency through the screenplay form, especially as manifested in fantastic-genre modes? To answer it, I watched about 2,400 episodes of Peak television in a little over a decade. The first year became an exploratory phase of data collection during which I didn't know exactly what I was searching for and thus viewed *both* **fantastic-genre TV shows** *and* **series that foregrounded strong diversity content**, after which I developed a selection and viewing methodology for the next five years. At that point, I realized that I would basically have to choose—either I could elect to study explicitly science-fiction, fantasy, horror, superhero, or fairytale genre TV, most of which made moderate, tangled, abstract efforts at diversity which even when focalized, had to me felt forced, diluted, unrelatable—or I could focus on shows made and controlled under some kind of diversity-centered production relations, most of which tended to generate televisual texts with substantially and believably diverse content, in order to see what kinds of fantastic-genre storytelling were going on within. With very few exceptions, the fantastic-genre series tended to be made, run, and written overwhelmingly by white males raised in the US—even among screenwriting which is a very elite and non-diverse occupation to begin with, this pattern stood out (and this is for a profession generally staffed by only 10% people of color and 24% women, to 90% and 76% white men respectively [Hollywood Writers Report, 2016]). So I chose the latter methodology: diverse television, referred to in this dissertation as “multitudinous,” with fantastic storytelling being one of several narrative modes of delivery, not necessarily the marketing or main commercial genre label. I sifted through about 12 pilot seasons (the main fall season, the spring midseason “replacements,” and several summers) of select new series mostly offered on broadcast, basic cable, and some paid cable. What shows up in this dissertation is an initial run at articulating patterns that struck me as important, patterns I hope to expand and explore in a series of media-studies books. Each chapter was conceived as a discrete set of inquiries for which I've gathered enough data to generate a full volume in order to respond to these

questions. The writing out of each dissertation chapter was thus used to identify initial data patterns that could help me understand which factors stood out and which seemed subsidiary in trying to get at these inquiries. I wanted to start outlining the relationship between these variables—and for some chapters, this process got more completed than others—so even though the dissertation in its current form might feel patchy and uneven, for me, it has been a very productive start.

Though I have long worked in political education and progressive social movements, the precise and very purposeful nature of my project's ideological work is harm reduction within the existing logic and institutional arrangements of Hollywood capitalism. This dissertation is not about revolution against the settler colonial state or Global North imperialism; and, though it makes diversity adjustments, gathering evidence to build a case for replacing white-male scripters with “others,” neither is it redistributive of wealth or restructuring of the current historical mode of production. My research relates to different types of occupational segregation and stratification within very unequal structures of US mass media and the ways that diverse labor can maneuver, survive, and (on occasion) thrive within capitalism. Because screenwriters as creative labor are positioned with a relative degree of workplace authority over the production of their imaginative work in generating influential mass media content, this is an important struggle—and not just to me. The structurally contradictory status of creative labor positioned between management and other knowledge industry workers is the topic of much debate in contemporary Marxist media studies. In this context, diversity labor and these types of progressive but internal institutional movements (aka reforms) that I write about lay the discursive groundwork for social change...even though they do not constitute structural transformations in any way. Keeping that in mind, the statistical outline of the reality that I am addressing and trying to articulate in more qualitative ways in my dissertation is as follows:

Of the 5,227 screenwriters employed full-time in Hollywood, the vast majority or 4,284 work in TV; 1693 are employed film; and even now, two decades into the millennium, only 163 are in news/informational and interactive media (Hollywood Writers Report, 2016). So the majority of commercial writers of audiovisual narrative are telling stories, not news or facts. From this realm of writers in commercial film/TV/video storytelling, show creators—in other words, those coming up with a series' premise then developing it into a distinct televisual language for its full run—in broadcast ICTs are 7.1% people of color (versus their

population demographic as 38.7% of population) v. 92.9% white and 22.1% female v. 77.9% male; for cable, this is 7.3% and 16.9%; for digital, 15.7% and 31.5% (for the 2015-16 year: Hollywood Writers Report).

From the teleplay writing rank-and-file, in terms of occupational segregation by race, the most typical employment pattern is that only 10% or less of ALL broadcast TV episodes are scripted by people of color. This employment pattern occurs 47% of the time with broadcast shows and is worse for cable where it arises 61% of the time. For gender occupational segregation among scripters' rank and file, the most common employment pattern in broadcast TV is that 41-50% of the episodes were scripted by women 2% of the time. In the content-rich era of Peak TV, we are diversity-poor, at least among the ranks of writers and producers.

Project Orientation, Research Design, Textual Methodology

This dissertation addresses how odd outlier shows like *Pose* arise amidst our period of "excellent" TV—departing from herdlike trends of hundreds of scripted series cleaving to conventionally raced and gendered discourses during this digital/"social" ICT era that has been labeled by communication scholars “post-televisionary” (Strangeglove 2015) as well as “media convergent” (Jenkins 2008). I am interested in the range of unusual, atypical production conditions that lead to the creation of such "unicorn" shows that contain subversive content via surprising genre mixes; their formal contributions to what film scholar Rick Altman calls the *genrefication* (1998) of various storytelling conventions within the larger cultural field of narrative television; and, finally, the ways that non-hegemonic showrunners, TV producers, and especially teleplay writers fight, on the job, to keep these series politically meaningful and artistically fresh using inventive storytelling tactics. Throughout this project, I aim to explore links between progressive management practice, the “diversity” hiring and mentoring of creative labor, and innovative uses of fantastic narrative modes in *scriptwriting*—as this term applies in the widest sense of *cinematic storytelling*, both written on-page and produced filmically.

An audiovisual writer-producer who identifies in equal parts as an anti-colonial, analytical Marxist; a 3.5-wave (i.e. between the third and fourth waves) feminist media scholar; and a Japanese-mercantile daughter descended from small-business entrepreneurs, I love television. I consider myself intimately, politically, spiritually shaped by it and plan to deploy my whole creative, “disruptor” self towards making it. As such, though this project

may resemble something scholarly, my primary intentions depart from those of the humanistic academy in these key ways. (a) It is powered, in great part, by a *business-industrial imaginary* in addition to (and sometimes complicating) a progressive political consciousness, a dimension reflected in occasional clusters of life writing about my own class position and past/future workforce engagement as a member of the creative labor class of mass-media industry. (b) Following US commercial media's commonsense knowledge as we near the end of the second decade of the millennium, in the wake of the success of fantastic-franchise film blockbusters starring non-white-male leads such as *The Fast and the Furious* series, *Black Panther*, and *Wonder Woman*, this project accepts as a given that diversity represents not only a social justice principle but also a proven product development and marketing strategy in the corporate-communications sector; that is, that multicultural content for diverse global audiences within mass-media storytelling and profitable sales are not mutually exclusive. I will repeat many times throughout this dissertation that I am not a theorist, but a storyteller from a family of merchants, who believes in the (r)evolutionary potential of the power of culture paired with the time-tested template of genre and the political tool of economics. Genre conventions provide comforting, slippery containers through which to import new cultural content from different worldviews into the mainstream in relatively acceptable ways. Hence, (c) as a sort of standpoint feminism wherein theory emanates from specific historical situations framing the experiences of the theorist (especially in the case of women), this dissertation comprises a practical set of marketplace and workplace observations—observations framed within the life narrative of me, a past and future mass-media cultural worker who plans to once more offer her labor up to the commercial employment markets of that industry. Framed thusly, the following textual analyses of 'TV shows' premises and their evolution, episodic and seasonal arcs, and story worlds and characters, collectively function as my theory of creative-labor evaluation—albeit in ways informed deeply by academic traditions of critical theory and cultural studies.

Additionally, the previously described research design departs from that of much fantastic-genre scholarship (except perhaps folklore studies). The data selection stage involved identifying texts produced by cultural and community groups within creative industry, then finding patterned fantastic modes of storytelling within that data set, rather than vice versa. That is: this project did not originate in identifying as a research subject obvious "fantasy-genre," "science-fiction-genre," "horror-genre," or "fairy-tale-genre" texts

among the many TV shows from the Third Golden Age (for instance: *Game of Thrones*, *Lost*, *Once Upon A Time*, *Battlestar Galactica*, etc.) then finding speckles of diversity in front of or behind the camera within those series; but rather, it began by examining diversity-centered shows—marked by ownership, workplace authority, or top-level management by women, LGBTQ community members, people of color, and/or representatives from other marginalized groups, who collectively hold multiple, powerful statuses in front of the camera (as protagonists or co-protagonists, in major starring roles), and/or behind the scenes (as executive producers, showrunners, or show creators)—then analyzing the ways that those creative artists, especially writers and producers, utilize fantastic-genre modes within a shifting, structured mixture of other narrative modalities, tonalities, and journeys. A few of the selected shows thereby selected might be regarded, at first glance, as "fantastic-genre" TV; most, however, are labeled with other genre categories in the television marketplace. This is a purposefully decolonial practice, because the field of TV producing and teleplay writing, like that for film directors and screenwriters, remains overwhelmingly dominated by US-raised, white American men—a general bias that seems even more present in the labor market for so-called "science-fiction and fantasy" TV showrunners, due to the full elevation of fantastic audio-visual texts from "genre-ghettoized" geek obscurantism to the status of a highly profitable and commercially viable family of genres since the millennium (when the new Golden Age of fantasy film began, according to fantasy cinema scholar David Butler). Shows collectively developed and executive-produced by, for example, people of color or women, rarely can afford to alienate their "niche" cultural or gender market by committing to pricey and possibly taste-dividing fantastic storytelling—especially since TV writers from marginalized backgrounds such as immigrants, LGBTQ members, African Americans, working-class families, etc., often use scripted TV as a pseudo-documentary/-journalistic stand-in, to communicate with similar or empathetic cultural audiences on salient sociopolitical issues and community stakes of the day. The development process directs these group members towards "proven," cheaper genres deemed easier to both market and produce, i.e. dramas, procedurals, soaps, and comedies, not the shiny fantastic televisual trend in storytelling which gets reserved for privileged white men (this privilege will be analyzed in further detail in the following chapter). Despite their relative non-access to producing officially "fantastic" series, black writers, producers, and showrunners create their own community language of fantasy, a storytelling mode that fantastic literary scholar

Rosemary Jackson nicknamed the language of subversion for this mode's quality of making readers/viewers escape the constricting box that is realist narrative.

Pursuing this strategy, I watched about 100 shows over a period of 5 years, with an average viewing length of 3 seasons per show, each season ranging from the “new normal” of 6-10 episodes for cable and streaming TV to the old network standard of 24 episodes. Except for three late-twentieth-century series analyzed in Chapter 2, I focused primarily on Peak TV era television. Except for about 10 reality series—mostly about working artists in creative industry—I viewed almost all scripted television. In addition to academic scholarship, I used professional reporting in industry trade and entertainment journalism sources—especially *Deadline*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, *Variety*, and the like—for a sense of reception and the political-economic context of production. From this larger set of shows, I identified a handful of major teleplay writing and showrunning auteurs working in TV from some kind of minority status background, and followed and analyzed their series' fantastic-genre practices as effective political expressions in this digital media age.

This project analyzes how commercial artists from diverse cultural backgrounds learn to employ thematic, formal, and rhetorical dimensions of genre discourse pragmatically, within their daily imaginative labor, situated inside the political-economic backdrop of multiple, related creative industries and markets, which evolve medium-and-technology-specific, viable fields of genre practice. Especially focusing on screenwriters and teleplay writers from the pre-production through the marketing and distribution phases of assembling the corporate industrial art that we think of as television, I will explore how these writers—and other narrative artists—labor to transform this larger cultural field of production, as they tussle with specific storytelling problems, aided by their lively exercise of genre discourse, especially the problematic, heteronormative, ethnocentric division between “believable” and “fantastic” storytelling modes. Without granting an unrealistic amount of agency to authorial intent, I will interrogate such artists' aesthetic and formal choices, as well as selection of story content, through observing the interaction between multiple genre modes used by these growing artists, and changing, inter-related media systems in which these modes function—rather than examining isolated genre forms and their particular genealogies, per se (for example, rather than attempting to define “science fiction TV”). My aim is to identify patterned openings, within the dominant structures of the media industry and corporate capitalism, through which, over time, progressive story artists can develop

meaningful knowledge bases and technical skill sets to tell counter-hegemonic, if difficult, truths by deploying mixes of fantastic and other genres within their narratives.

Structurally, this project assesses the creative labor of different minority, or historically marginalized, industry workers who significantly influence “story” within shows and episodes, in order to investigate the complexity of structural forces that shape the televisual fantastic form. The first chapter contextualizes the project not just in larger US television history but also in the wake of late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century neoliberalist state policy both domestically and abroad, in order to introduce accounts of African American TV auteurs. The second chapter studies indigenous-diasporic writers and directors employed historically within fantastic TV in the late twentieth century, to pose the question, “what is the political-economic map of televisual fantasy production?” Chapter three studies queer writers and producers, by first reviewing millennial, genre-mixing debates within the cohesive but ghettoized science fiction, fantasy, and horror print-literary communities, including narrative movements such as slipstream, interstitial fiction, New Wave Fabulism, the New Weird, and other experimental blends, then applies the implications of these passionate genre discussions, cross-medially, to Peak TV practices of artistry and meaning, through assessment of the blended genre modes of several sf/f/horror shows from the 2010s. Chapter four visits women, Asian American, and other immigrant TV writers and producers then start to engage the meaning of televisual authorship and especially audience response in times of digital expression across multiple ICTs. Chapter five follows up on those issues of cross-media authorship/response then concludes with ten major struggles faced by industrial narrative artists working in fantastic genre in the transmedial era.

When I began this project, I theorized that in commercial mass media, “good” TV storytelling, or even “quality” art in general—that which marshals the magics of form to transgress towards the upending of oppressive social structures; that which tenders substance sustaining, even liberating, to those without hope in such tumultuous financial and spiritual times; that which manages, in the words of Toni Morrison, the *beautiful and political at the same time*—never gets made in obvious ways. Contrary to the Digital Age discourse’s emphasis on the heralded technologies of the new era, the endless creative opportunities said to be offered by capitalism’s constant hunt for invention, and the visionary individualism of lone auteurs launching forth idiosyncratic, groundbreaking aesthetic styles like those of no

other, these are not the sites of actual labor, pathbreaking struggle, and lasting contribution to the human catalog of transformative story. Coming of age as a narrative artist within the neoliberal era of US economic history—a time of high stakes for commercial creative writers, who must create substance against/within the lofty, dazzling mirage of technology-driven social change that masks immense deprivation and predation—I am interested both in questions of production and in those of social reproduction. I ask how working artists reconnoiter the landscape of narrative and genre form in the context of workplace autonomy; how they come to identify (and balance) their own interests of expressive freedom through storytelling, with social responsibility towards those touched by their work; how they discover, then refine, multiple strategies of resistance, whether individual or collective, economic or aesthetic, to get their stories told; how they draw upon various traditions of tale-telling to produce visual, audio, performance, participatory, material, and written remediations that they then test on newly distributed audiences who sometimes respond in surprising ways. A community-based approach to televisual storytelling means that real industrial innovation is not about fresh new genius ideas developed by unique minds, but an ongoing political struggle of continuity and survivance. The fight is to uphold old spiritual messages, meanings, and methods, amidst changing forces of production including technology, media, labor, and—more and more—the human imagination.

My project is about finding the connections between production and form in order to change these numbers and systematically transform content. If we want a wealth of discursive and rhetorical resources from which to construct the groundwork for ideological struggle in the superstructure and eventual resistance and real change in the substructure, then this is the political work within mass media that calls. As characters in my favorite TV show about science, technology, industry, and innovation, AMC network's *Halt and Catch Fire*—which storifies the development of the personal computer and the Internet by creative business women and their men—is fond of saying, “This is not the thing, but the thing that gets us to the thing.”

CHAPTER 1. AFRICAN AMERICAN AUTEURS BRING ECONOMIC APPROACHES TO GENRE TELEVISION IN THE LONG DOWNTURN

"Have some fuckin' faith, bruh!"—Jee, *Black Jesus*
("Jesus Gonna Get His," S1E2, airdate 09/25/15)

Coming To *Jesus*; Or, Challenging The Class-Blind Neoliberal Directive Of Television's Third Golden Age

An infinite EBT card. A cellphone with billions of global digits in its contact list, even the personal numbers of the Pope and Judge Judy. A sustainable community garden growing magical, euphoria-inducing tomatoes and lettuce. These miraculous, economic-fantasy devices combine with realistically human mis-steps made by Jesus' new disciples, a group of likable, if flawed, African-American/LatinX poor and working-class characters, mistakes performed with ragged hope towards dreams of economic empowerment and spiritual salvation. The single-camera, situation comedy *Black Jesus* features the return of a 6'5", be-wigged and be-robed, modern-day Son of God, to the messy world of humans—the "ghetto," South Central-LA neighborhood of Compton, to be exact. Like his new crew of followers, mostly urban kids in their twenties, the titular lead character himself (Jesus or "Jee," played by Gerald "Slink" Johnson) happens to be an unemployed or underemployed, F-word-spouting, 40s-sipping stoner. Jesus' Compton compatriots—single-dad simpleton and aspiring deejay Boonie (Corey Holcomb), hunky hot-tempered ex-convict Fish (Andra Fuller), tech nerd Trayvon (Andra Bachelor), laid-back but square homeboy Jason (Antwon Tanner), and the lone female, sharp-tongued hoodrat Maggie (Kali Hawk)—navigate their neighborhood's sketchy economic opportunities as the Savior provides moral insight. These include improvised foot massages/sex work for quick cash; taco trucks serving up fish from a polluted city lake; suspicious church fundraisers; marijuana cultivation and drug dealing; gangbanging and heists; food stamps and child support payments; and other practices of financial and self-nourishment. Jee employs his Heavenly insight to counsel the young people on millennial life, as they cross paths with messed-up, ostensibly grown-up, community members who wield relative financial or political power over them, including street-level Mexican racketeers; corrupt Christian ministers; uncaring landlords and building

managers; predatory small business people; indifferent cops and social service workers; and a cantankerous homeless character (Lloyd, played with gusto by senior performer John Witherspoon).

Much like its African-American protagonist, *Black Jesus*—which aired on Cartoon Network’s edgy late-night programming block, “Adult Swim,” starting in 2014—stands out as a sort of interplanetary alien among its doggedly commonplace, human compatriots. For many years, it appeared as a one-of-a-kind “unicorn” series within what pop-culture journalists might call Peak TV but what some media scholars have labeled as the Third Golden Age of Television, the era of US media history, from roughly 1999 to the present, characterized by “quality” scripted television shows, especially cable-based and (later) streaming dramas centering around white-male, “antihero” protagonists such as drug lords and corporate innovators; delivered through complex, serialized plot structures that often included sophisticated narrative tricks such as parallel arcs, flash-forwards, and alternative or extensively flashbacked storylines; and presented via highly stylized and cinematic *mise-en-scene* and cinematography/editing. Also called the Platinum TV era, the Third Golden Age, broadly viewed as kicked off by the broadcast of David Chase’s *The Sopranos* on HBO (1999-2007), is popularly viewed as a time of “too much good TV,” a highly commercialized, if content-rich, period within the evolution of US mass communication systems and their communicology, marked by new TV channels and burgeoning experimental digital-era platforms that have resulted in an explosion of fresh fictional and documentary narrative forms, and in an accompanying profusion of seemingly “progressive” topics, as global media corporations reinvent evaluation methods and business vocabularies by which to identify, predict, measure, analyze, and optimize both profitability and quality of their evolving story products and services¹. As Jee’s crew might say, *Black Jesus*, even within this experimental milieu, proved a veritable freak of a show.

First, through the first decade and a half of the new millennium, the religious comedy served as one of the few scripted (fictional) Third Golden Age series that presented as its recurring characters members of underprivileged economic classes within a specific North American city, *not* by focusing on the urban dwellers’ dysfunction and social deviance—which most fictional-television series set in a US metropolis usually foregrounded, whether humorously or dramatically, via a white-middle-class, empathetic and liberal, yet nonetheless condescending, outsider’s gaze on poverty in America. Instead, *Black*

Jesus centered upon life's possibilities, an optimism borne out of a *different vision of the world* than that of the oblivious fatalism or seething despair typically exhibited by such character types towards a racist, heterosexist, and economically unequal social order. Rare for that initial era of Peak TV, *Black Jesus* chanced a rare, non-patronizing, *hopeful* portrayal of the underclass in the US. Such a visionary view of *what might be*, rather than *only what is*, for those in the working and lower social strata, distinguishes *Black Jesus* from similarly themed, "quality" scripted shows of the early Third Golden Age. These series include Showtime Network's "extreme" neighborhood dramedy *Shameless* (2011-present, adapted from British TV), developed by uber-producer and former Writers Guild of America-West President John Wells, about the misadventures of a poor white family in Chicago's south side, who proudly practice their class culture, even if it means drug/alcohol/sex addiction, physical violence, troubles with the law, and, in general, terrible impulse control; much-praised prison dramas and dramedies, including *Oz* (1993-2003, HBO) and Jenji Kohan's *Orange is the New Black* (2013-present, Netflix) through which, it seems, the shows' progressive fans take a voyeuristic tour of the seemingly inevitable end of working-class and poor people's life arcs in the slammer, from the safety of their middle- and upper-class homes; Michael J. Weithorn and David Litt's mainstream multi-camera comedy *The King of Queens* (1998-2007, CBS), a "safe" throwback to First Golden Age of Television sitcoms such as *The Honeymooners*, in which working-class people appear endearingly dumb but also humorously tough; the now-defunct, "trailer trash" sitcom *Raising Hope* (2010-2014, Fox), which objectifies lower-class white ignorance as charmingly clueless and innocent; or its sister single-camera comedy *My Name is Earl* (2005-2009, also Fox), a cartoonish, anti-heroic series about a goofy, rural-white ex-con seeking to make amends with those he has wronged, created by Greg Garcia, the same *Hope* showrunner². By highlighting the potential for everyday economic agency and self-empowerment among the poor, its defiantly sweet, cautiously upbeat orientation also separates *Black Jesus* from darkly realistic, scripted-TV snapshots of social conditions of the American underclass within unjust US sociopolitical institutions, offered through critically acclaimed, racialized/classed/gendered, serialized dramas, dramatic miniseries, or limited (dramatic) series, such as ABC's *American Crime* (2015-2017, created-produced by Oscar-winning screenwriter John Ridley); through the many crime-of-the-week cop/crime procedural shows influenced by the *Law and Order* series and its related, multi-series, story universe; or through gritty, multi-protagonist, regional-community and criminal-justice-

system dramas shaped by the work of former print journalist David Simon—best known for the 2002-2008 vice/crime series set within multiple social institutions of urban Baltimore, HBO's *The Wire*—but also creator of *Homicide: Life on the Street* (1993-1999, NBC), *The Corner* (2000, on HBO), and *Treme* (2010-2013, also HBO)³.

Second, *Black Jesus* stands out as a rare scripted series in the initial period of the Third Golden Age that placed the human experience of poverty right at front and center, in an affirming manner, accentuating the daily toils of denizens of the 'hood to create paying, self-sustaining work, as they continually seek physical sustenance to nourish their bodies. Grounded materially in the show's major theme of biological and spiritual hunger, food within this fictionalized version of Compton is not a mere side-prop to help Method actors build their characters' physicality, or a minor aesthetic signature of *Black Jesus*' production design. Like the city of Compton itself, food and drink often turn up as the series' unacknowledged, but recurring, guest (sometimes even starring) characters. For example, in "Never Say When" (Episode 8, Season 2, 2015), when Jee jaunts down the street holding a piece of bread, the homeless Lloyd confronts him about the Savior's earlier advice to quit alcohol and turn his life around through greater self-care. Jesus offers to share his food, but Lloyd tears off more than half the loaf for himself. "That's a big-ass piece of bread, Lloyd; I can feed a lot of people with that," Jee chastises mildly, reminding the audience, as well, not to take for granted their access to this humblest and oldest of nutritional fares. The remainder of the episode exposes the US alcohol industry for its rapacious targeting of vulnerable, poor, black people. To support his drinking habit by earning free booze, Lloyd becomes a paid, "authentic"-looking spokesperson for Darby, the show's fictional hard-liquor brand, which the company's advertising executives want to market to their average customer, who matches Lloyd's background to a tee. In the words of Darby's white-yuppie ad man, that target demographic is: "... (O)lder, we're thinking mostly men, mostly African Americans, mostly divorced, mostly unemployed or underemployed, mostly—what's the word I'm looking for?—not *alcoholic*, because we're not trying to encourage that, but—*desperate*." *Black Jesus* often deploys this thematic contrast—between healthy benefits of a spiritual perspective, versus ailments created by capitalism which exploits people's physical or psychic hunger—forcing TV viewers to observe fictionalized portrayals of what African American communities have popularly nicknamed *The Struggle*: the sheer ordinariness of difficult, draining, and dangerous life in poor neighborhoods. Other episodes feature Jee's

crew engaging in the daily dynamics of street capitalism, the state welfare system, the physical and psychological consequences of joblessness and houselessness, and varied personal inter-changes of goods/services (via different forms of barter) in the unofficial or underground economy, in order to pay one's bills and rent, or to simply enjoy twenty-first-century life. "Janky Cable" (Episode 9, Season 2, 2015), for instance, essentially spent the full 20 minutes of the show depicting the crew—Jesus included—passionately debating the ethics of stealing paid cable service from large media conglomerates (which, as Jee and Trayvon argue in one scene, both unfairly monopolize local distribution of TV shows *and* provide bad customer service), in order to share watching an overpriced but trendy, pay-per-view (PPV) match of black v. Filipino boxers with the crew's poor neighbors and friends through a "fight (-viewing) party"⁴. In *Black Jesus*' version, local fight parties charge anywhere from \$25-30 per customer for admission to Compton apartments and homes that have paid the PPV fee, but Jee and his crew—who arrange to steal cable service temporarily, aided by Trayvon and his father, a cable-company installer—hold their own community party, where they offer admission to the televised fight at \$12 a head, as a sort of semi-public service that draws 50 excited neighbors and friends to Jesus' place. In essence, *Black Jesus* merrily centers around Compton community members' basic efforts to eat and to live, including economic misdemeanors, hustles and moochings-off, formal and informal labor, and various harmless (but frequently semi-legal or outright illegal) efforts at financial survival and meaning making.

In the early millennial landscape of fictional TV, such intimate, detailed, often tedious exposures of daily life on the bottom rungs of the American socio-economic ladder, of US societal practices of institutionalized classism (and related racism) directed against the poor, and of real versus imaginary life paths for these populations, were, simply speaking, taboo. This was not simply because this initial phase of Third Golden Age television shows arose within what critical intellectual traditions consider an ideological superstructure that culturally legitimized, and functioned to reproduce, powerful economic relationships and institutions constituting the monster substructure of global capitalism. For from the medium's very start as an Information and Communication Technology (ICT) platform, during the postwar era in which the earliest, often live, fictional TV shows brandished corporate sponsors' names prominently, and permanently, within the series' titles, company profit-making has been an integral industrial directive of the television platform, shaping

genre form and limiting subversive content. Examples of First Golden Age dramatic TV shows sponsored by major corporations include: Kraft Television Theater, The Ford Theater, Philco and Goodyear Television Playhouses, US Steel Hour, The Texaco Star Theater, General Electric Theater, and the Chrysler Theater. As the late, great US film and cultural critic Pauline Kael once opined, “Movies are a combination of art and mass medium, but television is so single in its purpose—selling—that it operates without that painful, poignant mixture of aspiration and effort and compromise.” Often a narrative long form in which continued cultural production relies upon both audience ratings and consumer-industry advertising, scripted TV constitutes an unabashedly commercial ICT.

Despite the formidable dictates of corporate-network policy not to offend existing or potential viewing customers, earlier generations of television writers, producers, and performers, during artistic/business explosions of the medium similar to that of the Third Golden Age, had managed to hold strong in representing the daily problems faced by working-class, and even lower-class, characters within their communities, through the fictional shows of those eras. Though known for its culturally homogenizing, white-middle-class family portrayals on prototypical ‘50s shows like *Leave it To Beaver* (1957-1963, CBS) and *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* (1952-1966, ABC), the First Golden Age of Television (1948-1960) also featured series beloved by critics and audiences alike that focused around ethnically specific white characters within financially tenuous regional communities: for instance, the stagey drama *Mama* (1949-1957, CBS), about a working-class, immigrant Norwegian family in San Francisco, which featured a poor boarder among its regular cast of characters; and comedy-drama *The Goldbergs* (adapted from radio; 1949-1956, alternately CBS, NBC, and Dumont, the last network showing it live), about a diasporic Jewish family acclimating into a working-class Bronx tenement and the new demands of US culture.

Many hit prime-time series of the Second Golden Age of TV (1971-1994) continued this narrative trend, such as *The Waltons* (1972-1981, CBS), which featured a family of struggling farmers/small-time lumber-mill owners living off the land, within a rural, mixed-class community that often encompassed destitute characters, sometimes of different races⁵. Though *The Waltons* was occasionally joined by other prime-time series featuring urban-working-class or rural-poor white people, such as *Laverne and Shirley* (1976-1983, ABC), *Alice* (1976-1985, CBS), or *The Dukes of Hazzard* (1979-1985, CBS), US scripted television during this era, as an institution of cultural production, began to address racial diversity within this

symbolic landscape of economically stressed communities. For viewers of color, the Second Golden Age—during which I grew up, socialized deep within its inventive televisual imaginary—debuted the United States’ first significant wave of situation comedies depicting protagonists or recurring characters from communities of color, especially those raised in lower-middle-class, working-class, and lower-class positions, such as *Sanford and Son* (1972-1977, NBC), *Chico and the Man* (1974-1978, NBC), *Good Times* (1974-1979, CBS), and *The Jeffersons* (1975-1984, CBS), alongside various racially integrated comedies reflecting poor and working-class communities like *Welcome Back, Kotter* (1975-1979, ABC), echoing a larger integrational trend in TV dramas from the 1960s (*The Mod Squad*; *I Spy*; *Star Trek: The Original Series*).

By contrast, in the initial phase of the Third Golden Age, the economic conservatism evidenced amidst the landscape of scripted series illustrates the historical impact of four decades of neoliberal economic policy. Television’s general avoidance of sustained depictions of the everyday lives of working-class people and those in poverty, compared to the first two Golden Ages’ televisual discourses, reflects a supplanting of Keynesian economics by free-market approaches to state policymaking by the US government and of this policy’s devastating effects upon the American class structure. *Neoliberalism*—which progressive media scholar Robert W. McChesney defines as a “set of national and international policies that call for business domination of all social affairs with minimal countervailing force”—historically manifested within the United States through several historical factors.⁶ According to longtime sociologist of poverty and social-historian of poor people’s social movements, Frances Fox Piven, these factors include domestic anti-union mobilization efforts of the US business sector in the 1970s; the outright anti-poor, severe fiscal/budget cuts to public welfare by the Reagan Administration during the 1980s; and the traitorous joining of mainstream Congressional Democrats alongside their Republican colleagues in the US Senate and House of Representatives to “reform” (i.e. severely curtail the benefits of) what was left of the welfare system in the late 1990s⁷. Near the millennium’s start, this last economic change resulted in the replacement of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and similarly long-term, federal programs to mitigate inter-generational poverty, with Temporary Assistance To Needy Families (TANF) and other inadequate, largely state-by-state-discretionary, short-term band-aids, effectively ending national efforts against poverty such as President Lyndon B. Johnson’s “War on

Poverty” and striking a fatal blow to the longer legacy of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal. Piven has for decades tracked wages, cost of living, housing and healthcare costs, government assistance and benefits, and related economic variables among lower-, working-, and middle-class families in the nation. She notes that as a cumulative effect of these late-twentieth-century government policies supporting corporate and upper-class control over the American economy over protecting the interests of average US workers and poor people, the domestic poverty rate had been rising well before the US financial sector’s meltdown/Great Recession of 2007-2009. In fact, this poverty rate actually *increased* during the last period of *economic growth* prior to that downturn, as the numbers had reflected even worse millennial conditions of unemployment and of real take-home pay for women and for people of color⁸.

Such neoliberal policies adopted the ideological assumption of—in the words of Nobel-prize-winning economist (and noted critic of free-market fundamentalism) Joseph E. Stiglitz—“rational and well-informed consumers interacting with profit-maximizing firms in competitive markets in a world with perfect risk and capital markets.” However, within the real-world marketplace, the considerable gap in actual power between these two parties (consumers and companies) ensured that the state’s application of neoliberalization ignited soaring rates of economic inequality, both in the US and, perhaps more notably, around the world⁹. Public critics of global capitalism like Naomi Klein have noted that during the opening years of this four-decade period—kicked off also domestically by US Federal Reserve Board Chairman Paul Volcker’s efforts in the late 1970s at curbing inflation through monetary policies that de-prioritized full American employment—at the *international* level, similar shifts in fiscal and economic policy transformed the financial structures of key economic powers. For example, parallel policy transformations transpired in the United Kingdom, with Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s battles to curtail trade union power and institute fiscal policies to cap inflation, similar to those of Volcker; and in the People’s Republic of China, with widespread initiatives of Chairman Mao Tse Tung’s *de facto* heir-to-the-throne, Deng Xiaoping, away from actual socialism and theoretical communism, towards market liberalization and deregulation. These international replications in effect laid down the state-supported groundwork for the worldwide proliferation of neoliberalism by the new millennium¹⁰.

Analyses by prominent Western scholars trained in Marxist theoretical frameworks underscore the expansionist agenda of neoliberalism. David Harvey, for example, views neoliberalization as an aggressively redistributive movement linking global political-economic elites. “Redistributive effects and increasing social inequality have in fact been such a persistent feature of neoliberalization as to be regarded as structural to the whole project,” Harvey observes, noting that this movement has functioned to re-establish (or, in the case of Boris Yeltsin’s post-Soviet Russia and Deng’s post-Mao China, to establish newly) the authority of the international corporate class, whose agenda is generating global conditions to revitalize their opportunities for capital accumulation (16-19). Working from the methodological tradition of empirical researchers of social stratification, Thomas Piketty’s lauded cross-national, quantitative, *and* historical study of income and wealth inequality goes one step further, identifying the current period in world economic history as one characterized by the regressive redistribution of valued societal resources, away from mid-twentieth-century gains in social mobility, back to the sharp stratification structures of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, when private wealth had been monopolized by a few elite families seated atop a (basically) fixed class structure, eclipsing national income and directing state policies to maintain the power of the wealthy¹¹. The end result of these neoliberal trends is a dismal financial landscape reflecting the international ravages of what critical economic scholars have labeled “turbo capitalism” (Luttwak 2000); “zombie capitalism” (Harman 2010); “hyper capitalism” (Gonick and Kasser 2014)—reflecting decades of hegemonic state policy that political Marxist Robert Brenner has called the “long downturn” (2006) or that Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri elegantly label “empire” (2000). In other words, to borrow Piven’s less abstract explication, “careening economic instabilities, worsening ecological disasters, brutal wars, a depleted public sector and poverty in the affluent global north, and the prospect of mass famine in the global south”—this is the worldwide context of the Third Golden Age of Television, our era of Platinum/Peak TV.

While mainstream journalists have praised this TV age for its “innovative” shows¹² and traditional media scholars have debated the evaluative standards, aesthetic and substantive features, and immediate historical circumstances characterizing the era’s “quality TV,”¹³ critical theorists, such as those from the corporate-media-as-propaganda school of thinking, including the aforementioned McChesney (co-creator of the Free Press, a lobbying group advocating for greater government oversight of the Internet), note the connection

between the eviscerated, ever more stratified, domestic and world economies of the new millennium, on the one hand, and this unadulterated praise, by working critics and academics employed within the US culture industry, over the seeming richness of digital-era media content, delivered through so many developing storytelling venues, technologies, and platforms, on the other. At the start of the Third Golden Age, in his much-cited, cautionary overview of the coming communications era, “Global Media, Neoliberalism, and Imperialism,” McChesney warned media watchers not to drink the Kool-Aid; rather, they should look askance at any oncoming rhetorics of liberational digital technology, and rigorously study the global media system for ways that it regularly “advances corporate and commercial interests and values and denigrates or ignores that which cannot be incorporated into its mission.” After all, neoliberalism, he cautioned, had historically managed the business domination of society through the combination of (1) (an ostensibly) representative democracy that, in actuality, is “a weak and ineffectual polity typified by high degrees of depoliticization, *especially among the poor and working class*”; and (2) a *commercial media system* that helps the corporate sector legitimize its social power “without using a police state or facing effective popular resistance” [(2001); emphases mine]. Media silencing of economically subjugated populations, for McChesney and other corporate critics, is no accidental trait or casual byproduct of post-millennial media—but a targeted exercise of informal, yet highly institutionalized, social control over the very people whose interests clash most directly against those of global Internet, TV, film, music, sports, and advertising firms (i.e. the entertainment industry) which aim to make poor and working-class populations into eternal consumers rather than freely expressive, volitional agents. Against constant industrial attempts at erasure and consumerization of at-risk economic populations, these scholars propose that we should be ever vigilant in tracing contemporary patterns of such groups’ true communications over mass media, whether expressed over their own, non-globalization-filtered, local and community platforms (oral, print, digital, interactive, or other), or over the national cultural discourse presented through corporate mass venues. In her seminal “Rethinking the Digital Age,” ethnic media scholar Faye Ginsburg argues that journalists’ superficial usage of the terms “Digital Age” and (and the more liberal concept of) “Digital Divide” tends to be ethnocentric and stratifying, and, in contrast, that unpacking these terms in order to explore non-profit-oriented, digital-technology practice by marginalized communities—in her particular research, local and networked media practices

by indigenous, Native, and Aboriginal groups—would challenge existing communication hierarchies that have become naturalized by global capitalism within the Digital Age/Divide discourse¹⁴. At the same time, she posits, recognition of alternative media practice can serve as a survival tool against further disenfranchisement, genocide, and symbolic erasure of indigenous peoples and other subaltern populations, as these community-based media makers, she argues, function as “cultural activists” who manipulate evolving technologies to create “new kinds of cultural forms” in order to revive “relationships to their lands, local languages, traditions and histories and articulating community concerns” (139). In addition to working their own communication networks with existing technologies, Ginsburg emphasizes, cultural activists marshal corporate-produced, audio-visual, and participatory platforms, to further “social and political transformation by inserting their own stories into national narratives.” In the broader context of a twenty-first century, global media system that has become highly concentrated into three or four dozen transnational corporations across the world—topped by ten, mostly US-based, mega-media conglomerates¹⁵—the larger stakes of unearthing and evaluating economically disenfranchised media voices, become clear: without these alternative perspectives, the realization of a truly free, public sphere of discourse, the possibilities for mass communication of any kind of counter-hegemonic or critical thinking, are growing more and more endangered. Progressive media researchers thus remind us to regard what seem like delightful advances in television’s narrative quality and story content in the Third Golden Age in a skeptical manner, and to persist in inquiring as to why there exists so little scripted-show content that illustrates the qualities of poor and working-class existence in the US and the globe—particularly, but not only, fictional-television series prioritizing characters and communities of color—when such depictions would reflect the living political-economic reality of so many viewers out there in TV land.

McGruder and Clattenburg Subversively Apply Critical Genre-Mixing

Perhaps one way of solidifying this inquiry is to examine both the storytelling practices, and the unusual conditions of production, as they stand in relation to each other, behind one of the few Third Golden Age television series that gets it right. This first chapter deploys, as an extended opening illustration, a walk-through analyses of the sophisticated comedic tactics of *Black Jesus*, as an entryway for proposing an approach to television genre theory from the viewpoint of pre-production within the field of production studies, or more specifically, from the perspective of the working screenwriter, as one of several,

hierarchically stratified classes of global artistic labor drawn into producing the ever-changing digital landscape of TV. For storytelling within the television medium, teleplay writers deploy genres, which come with certain functions that “create effects of reality and truth which are central to the different ways the world is understood” (Frow 19).¹⁶ Whether these writers work on story ideas (e.g. a human-alien love story); story concepts/premises/set-ups (idea turned premise: a buddy cop show in which a galactic-alien detective bickers with, then falls for, his human partner, set amidst post-Katrina New Orleans); story development (premise exploration: multi-episode arcs for the show’s first season, where the two partners start to take down a Bourbon Street drug lord ruling over the city’s crime empire); or the actual scriptwriting process (the pilot teleplay, where the two detectives reluctantly get paired, then clash over solving a series of French Quarter narcotics deals gone bad)—they couch these genre effects within what Frow calls existing semantic frames that usher in “ontological domains—implicit reality which genres form as a pre-given reference, together with the effects of authority and plausibility which are specific to the genre” (i.e. the overlapping, but hopefully believable, ontological domains of crime tale, cop show, drama, science fiction, romantic comedy, and N’awlins story).¹⁷ Understanding the actual genre production process, the ways that teleplay writers manipulate these multiple frames and domains of meaning, within the practice of authoring different stages, drafts, and productions of televisual genre texts, is no simple feat. The nuanced storytelling strategy of *Black Jesus*—one that religious and television critics, originally expecting crudely rebellious, disrespectful ribaldry from the show’s profanity-laden, stoner-protagonist set-up, have started to praise for its delicate touch and grounded optimism¹⁸—was made possible by the showrunners/co-creators overcoming a number of both aesthetic and industrial hurdles, which may be unfamiliar to viewers who only study the TV text itself (i.e. just the shooting script, or a transcribed script from the actual produced episode; or only that particular audio-visual installment of the show), without elaboration of (1) the artistic-expressive context and (2) the economic context, of genre production, that together frame *Black Jesus*’ particular narrative tactics. My method follows in the “non-textualist” avenue of conceptualizing television genre, led by TV scholar Jason Mittell (8),¹⁹ who urges researchers to view genres as highly contextualized discursive practices rather than fixed, textually centered, sets of qualities that might seem obvious in light of common-sensical, categorical labels applied hegemonically by the industry (for example: shows featuring star-crossed lovers, plots to

destroy/take over the family business, characters who manipulate/sleep their way to the top, and evil bosses are “prime-time soaps”; series parading dark lighting, devilish/monstrous characters, and stylized depictions of sex and violence are “horror shows”).²⁰ Genres, Mittel argues, need to be located beyond the text, “within complex interrelations among texts, industries, audiences, and historical context” (7). While Mittel—whose approach reflects that of a university academic and TV viewer, not that of a creative writer, artist, producer, or Ginsburgian “cultural activist”—limits these discursive practices and inter-relational dynamics to definition (his example of genre features: “this show is a sitcom because it has a laugh track”); interpretation (he offers this illustration of insight into genre meaning: “sitcoms reflect and reinforce the status quo”), and evaluation (“sitcoms are better entertainment than soap operas,” Mittel provides, as a sample assessment),²¹ my project, shaped also by the folkloric research of feminist scholar Cristina Bacchilega—especially her theory of a multi-medial, transnational fairy tale web as an ongoing set of historically and regionally specific, discursive “wonder” practices by diverse communities of readers, writers, listeners, artists, viewers, and participants engaged in multiple versions of story²²—adds on creative actions such as imagining, en-visioning, re-telling/re-interpreting, media-making, designing, producing, and writing as practiced, tested, and advanced by working narrative artists. It is my hope that applying this multi-dimensional approach to television genre towards *Black Jesus*—an exercise performed largely from an artist’s rather than the scholar’s perspective—might set up a working frame through which to analyze the current political stakes and struggles of commercial TV storytelling auteurs, as well as to introduce my creative project.

Artistic-Expressive Context

The artistic-expressive context in which *Black Jesus* operates can be understood, in part, by examining the discursive genre practices that the showrunners/co-creators drew upon, in imagining the basic story concept for the series. This vibrant artistic practice—of envisioning (i.e. story-premising), then proposing (i.e. pitching) and developing (i.e. pilot writing, producing, and beta-testing), a new show from scratch—requires more than the genre definition and genre interpretation that Mittel delineates, actions which still seem to assume a separate/stable subject (reader or writer) and object (text), rather than multi-dimensionally interactive, dynamic, and concurrent relationships and cycles of creative-

evaluative genre practices. As Frow argues, the seemingly straightforward concept of genre simultaneously possesses multiple structural dimensions—the formal (aesthetic, linguistic, stylistic), the thematic (topical, subjective, conceptual), and the rhetorical (situational, material, receptive)²³—so writer-producers coming up with fresh television projects must intermix and juggle these three generic dimensions, when communicating their pitches and sizzle reels²⁴, to sell ideas for shows to TV networks. Co-created by iconoclastic African American political cartoonist and animation writer-producer Aaron McGruder (known for shepherding his East Coast racial satire, *The Boondocks*, from its original, college-newspaper, comic-strip form, into a nationally syndicated, editorial cartoon, and then into an animated, cable-television show) and irreverent Canadian film, TV, and music video writer-director Mike Clattenburg (acclaimed for the scripted mockumentary film and television series, *Trailer Park Boys*, centered on the lives of lower-class, Nova Scotian, petty criminals), *Black Jesus* serves as a testament to the two auteurs’ mastery of mixing obvious genre practices at the surface, thematic level; with less overt genre inflections of their stories using stylistic and narrative techniques at the formal level; supported by the largely unseen conditions of negotiating for artistic latitude in genre expression at the rhetorical level.

Thematic Genre in Black Jesus

Showrunners McGruder and Clattenburg’s initial genre strategy, in en-visioning the core story concept of *Black Jesus*, has been to build episodes upon a spiritual-fantasy-meets-dramatic-reality-based premise that, on the surface, promises to spark thematic tensions between the sacred and the profane, the religious and the unruly: “What would Jesus do if he were to reappear today, in poor neighborhoods, where his moral and spiritual guidance were most needed?... (I) f we go back 2014 years ago to Judea, *that* was the hood,” contextualizes Robert Eric Wise, executive producer of *Black Jesus*, to explain the actual generic affinity behind the basic set-up of blending classic, New Testament ethos, with urban street stories: “Compton right now is nowhere near as rough as Judea back then...the real biblical and historical Jesus was born and raised in the hood.” In re-telling/re-interpreting Jee’s Biblical adventures,²⁵ re-set in the rowdy turf that famously produced urban rappers such as Kendrick Lamar, NWA, Compton’s Most Wanted, and The Game, McGruder and Clattenburg seem to remind their writing staff that the series’ imaginative, magical aspects should always be secondary to the tough, grounded stuff of lower-class street life. To me, an

aspiring TV-series teleplay author, training in story techniques for regionalizing the urban fantasy and horror genres, the show's directive to sharpen speculative situations of religious miracles and godlike behavior with believable settings, societal problems, and character choices calls for delicate narrative skills. For the topical blend of fantasy and reality can be symbolically dicey: on the one hand, threatening to head in the fantastic direction of uncritical escapism and thereby providing false hope to poor populations; and, on the other, dangerously reinforcing bootstrapping, neoliberal ideologies of hard work, moral behavior, personal responsibility, and small-scale business efforts in the other, realist direction. While conventional cultural studies scholars would understand this prioritization of the reality over the fantasy genre as a discursive practice of genre interpretation—analyzing its meaning as a recurring, textual theme that arises throughout the episodes—I want to underscore that the thematic-genre balance itself is produced by a specific pre-production design, structured into rules of the series' writers bible and constantly reinforced at writers' room meetings.

A recent episode showcases how the *Black Jesus* directors, performers, and writers perform the work of the showrunners' genre design to achieve this halfway mark. Like many other stories in the series, the 2015 installment "Tasty Tudi's" (Episode 5, Season 2) pits Jee's divine directive to physically feed and spiritually nourish the hungry masses of his adopted, economically stressed neighborhood against local entrepreneurs' desire to profit off of that vulnerable community. The writers position Jesus against Boonie's money-hungry mother, Ms. Tudi (played with churchy triumphalism by Angela Elayne Gibbs) a lower-middle-class, self-professed Christian taking her turn as one of the show's supporting cast of minor villains. Tudi uses her single-parent son's welfare money, allocated for his children, to start, Tasty Tudi's, a makeshift (and illegal) restaurant operating out of her house that markets African American cuisine to bourgeois Angeleno foodies from more upscale parts of the city. As the episode opens, a broke and hungry Jee, Boonie, Fish, Trayvon, and Jason show up at the restaurant/house, hoping in vain that Ms. Tudi will feed them alongside the white hipsters to whom she has advertised this "authentic" epicurean experience. Jee asks the ever-business-attired Tudi, who actually believes him to be the Savior,²⁶ why won't she let him inside the dining area, to which she retorts that Jesus is already always in her heart. When Jason appeals to her maternal instinct, saying she's like a mother to all of them, Ms. Tudi wisecracks that she doesn't even want to be Boonie's mama. When Fish points out that she's choosing to feed strangers that she met online, but not her son and his friends, she

snaps back, “These ain’t strangers; these are *customers*. What, you got the \$60 a plate that I’m chargin’,” before turning the boys away, still ravenous.

The next plot point draws an invisible genre boundary of the series’ universe, demarcating where the fantasy elements end and the reality ones hold strong: just because the crew is hanging with the Everlasting Father, it doesn’t mean that life in the ‘hood will get any easier. Central to the design of the show’s plotting practice is that Jesus rarely uses Godly powers to solve his friends’ (or even his) everyday economic problems. “Hey, man, (why don’t) ‘chu make about five hot dogs and five 40s appear, so that you can feed the crew tonight?” a starving Boonie asks Jee in the next scene, as the boys realize that between the cashless, jobless five, they only own a near-empty bag of chips for physical sustenance. Jesus’ response exemplifies a central moral value that the show promotes among working-class and poor viewers: that of self-autonomy and making meaningful choices that could lead to plenitude (such as searching for/creating work, or applying for government assistance) as personal solutions to all ailments economic. He responds, “Look, man, God ain’t gon’ solve all our problems. If we ain’t eating, that means we ain’t hustling all hard ‘nuff.” Drawing digital straws on Trayvon’s cellphone app, the boys decide that Fish will apply for food stamps at the neighborhood SNAP office, to receive state assistance for buying groceries for them all. Without divine intervention, but rather through a dodgy sexual-harassment side plot wherein Fish twitches his gym-sculpted pectoral muscles at the horny, middle-aged social worker Laverne (performed, with a wink, by black stand-up comedienne Luenell Campbell), in exchange for a no-limit “black” card (i.e. food-stamp debit card), the boys end up with an abundance of store-bought food. “Hallelujah, hallelujah, we ‘bout to have a feast. Thank God for EBT; man, that EBT really help folks, man,” Jee evaluates, as the crew happily prepares a meal. As the episode proceeds, editorial comments like these demonstrate that the story’s substantive fantasy lies not in the card’s unlimited balance per se (a seemingly magical plot detail), but in the fact that a (usually) reasonable and fair application system for the poor to receive food stamps from the state exists at all—an imaginative and wondrous, albeit secular and real-world, practice.

In fact, through “Tasty Tudi’s,” the most salient speculative elements derive from Jesus’ Godly stance on personal actions that reproduce conditions of hunger v. actions that might produce conditions of self-sustenance for oneself, one’s friends, and the community—not from showy magical acts that might drive the plot of other fantasy TV

shows.²⁷ Modeling his superior morality, Jee refuses to judge Fish for his sex-for-food exchange with Laverne, instead displaying concern over its spiritual effects upon the ex-con's self esteem: "Man, Pops don't care who you lovin', as long as you lovin' yourself at the same time. And you know, some of my favorite women is prostitutes, dawg. You know, sex work is some hard work, Fish, and if you gon' keep on smashing baby girl for them food, man, how's that gon' make you feel?"—to which Fish replies, "Beats feeling hungry, I know that much." Once they have fed, Jee curtails his crew from any selfishness and sloth that might arise from holding such a seemingly fantastical bounty, advising them that gluttony is a sin, and that they should now go into the community to spread the Word, instead of continuing to get fat; in fact, they should feed the hungry in a former soup kitchen (turned gang space) downtown, using the "magic" EBT card, as well. "Damn, Jesus, why we can't enjoy some shit once in a while? Why everything gotta be a community service," mourns Boonie.

The episode's subtly fantastic dimension circles around Jee's Godlike judgment of economic predation, especially by local business people trying to make a buck off the backs of their lower and working class neighbors. When Ms. Tudi discovers the boys' black card, suddenly expressing a newfound, familial love for her sons' friends and a deep hurt at being excluded from their plans ("...I thought we were a team: crew love!—huh?—Crew love. But I see Ms. Tudi just *out in the cold!*"), she invites them into her house for some red wine—i.e., to discuss her piece of the action. "Ms. Tudi, now, why every time we try to do something good for mankind, you gotta turn it into a money hustle? C'mon now, that food is for the poor and unfortunate, man, why you gotta act greedy all the time?" Jesus inquires. "Greedy? Jesus, you the one that's being greedy. Why does everything have to be for the poor, huh? I mean, you don't think we wanna do shit?" retorts Tudi, who proposes turning the defunct soup kitchen into an \$80-a-plate theme restaurant with costume-play "ghetto theatre" performed by poor community residents before "cultured" white customers, and sharing a cut with the boys, much to Jee's disgust. Later, privately offering (for-pay, of course) "representation" services to Fish, so that Laverne does not demand so much sex from him in exchange for the EBT card's ongoing use, Ms. Tudi even stoops to *de facto* pimping. Through Angela Elayne Gibbs' humorous but believable performance of these transparent, self-serving actions, the show's layered direction of Ms. Tudi never depicts her as evil, so much as pragmatic, shrewd, and hugely ignorant—representing both unethical,

small-business capitalism and hypocritical Christianity at their worst, through the designed character type of “your friend’s mom,” the amiable auntie-next-door.

Formal Genre in Black Jesus

At its best, *Black Jesus* works due to the showrunners’ innovative formal method of binding the usually opposite genre modes of the fantastic and the believable: to mix them effectively without making the show’s tone zip unevenly from light/hopeful (fantasy) to dark/pragmatic (realism), the writers-producers/directors—managing a crew of performers, videographers, editors, production designers, and other artists—aesthetically resort to the audio-visual *mise-en-scène*²⁸ of comedy; specifically, an historically congenial crossing of the stoner (formerly “drinking”)-buddies subgenre and the “Our Gang”-of-neighborhood-misfits subgenre of classic TV/film comedy. This on-camera mood is achieved not only through the written script, but by formal elements such as set design, costume/make-up, performers’ acting styles, cinematographic composition, and the speed/pacing of shots. For the majority of the show’s running time, especially its initial, low-budget scenes, Jee and his crew simply hang out at one of the characters’ apartments or in the streets of Compton, talking out personal issues. The *mise-en-scène* requires nothing fancy, production-wise, as the young characters simply dress and behave in ways similar to the performers’ peers and generational cohorts; they swear, drink, smoke, talk shit, joke around, and sometimes get emotional, as the camerawork and edits collaborate to maximize the irony and laughs of each actor’s performance. These technical elements of *Black Jesus* help the TV crew depict the world of a chill, if occasionally wasted, friendship among modern twenty-something buddies, each drawing the others into their everyday problems, such as getting into social media beefs with one’s female rivals (Maggie);²⁹ deciding whether to attend one’s final parole meeting where peeing in a cup will be required, after having spent prior weeks heavily imbibing weed (Fish);³⁰ or coming up with the cash to contribute delinquent child support to an ever-angry baby mama (Boonie).³¹ Often, the disciples’ first instincts on how to deal with life’s challenges are very wrong, very human, and very funny [i.e. to hunt down one’s Facebook detractors then physically teach them who’s boss, in Maggie’s case; to pack up and go on the lam rather than get busted for urine test results showing THC, in Fish’s situation; or to deny the financial claims of his ex Shalinka (played by another talented African American stand-up comedienne, Dominique Witten) by lying that he had already paid up, in Boonie’s plotline].

Such typical-sitcom set-ups by the series' writing staff—together with performances marked by comic timing and humorous cinematography/editing techniques—create a low-key, sardonic tonal register for the majority of the episode, as Jee tenderly guides each member towards choosing more mature options and evolving into their better selves. While this mellow comedic tone skillfully marries the two more obvious, main genres of religious fantasy and realistic drama, at the same time, an average episode's narrative structure is hewed out formally by another subgenre: Blaxploitation's scenes/sequences of shocking action and violence (to punctuate excitement and conflict) and the Blaxploitation subgenre's exaggerated plot points, driven by the logic of righteous street morality (to make the ultimate ethical lesson).

For example, in "Tasty Tudi's," when Ms. Tudi first confronts Jee and the crew about their infinite debit card, she does not simply call them out. A visual sequence becomes necessary to add dramatic texture and physical action between the episode's many intellectual conversations held by Jee and his disciplines about the ethics of feeding the needy. While the crew prepares the soup kitchen for its conversion into a new eatery for the poor, Ms. Tudi first observes them secretly from her own car, having noted her son Boonie's wider girth due to his recent heightened consumption of food, then hijacks Jesus' beaten-down truck (a gift from his "Pops" the Almighty), driving it crazily to her house, where the boys are forced to follow her in an exciting (albeit largely offscreen) chase before listening to her proposal. This kind of exaggerated action sequence and sudden, nyah-ha-ha-villainous act comes from Blaxploitation's often-cartoonish genre vocabulary. The same goes for the episode's ending, where—after a comical catfight between Ms. Tudi and Laverne in front of both wealthy and lower-class diners at the new combined space of the "ghetto"-themed restaurant for white foodies and Jee's food truck for the hungry exposes the two middle-class "community role models" as fraudulent, self-serving thugs not to be trusted—the women make their peace over sharing the card's profits. How to undo their mutual, shameful unmasking? Ms. Tudi whispers to Laverne, "Get ready to take a bow, bitch," then loudly proclaims, "And—scene!"—upon which the pair gets up from the floor, joins hands, and genuflects before the customers and homeless people, claiming the fight to be mere street theatre for their entertainment. The Blaxploitation subgenre's logic of righteous street morality teaches viewers, through this closing, that, on the one hand, evil will always be

unveiled, but, on the other, hustlers survive by continuing to hustle, even (and especially) when they're most down and out.

Economic Context and Rhetorical Genre in Black Jesus

A less obvious category of genre practice performed by *Black Jesus*' artistic team than those operating within thematic and formal dimensions is Frow's rhetorical aspect of genre, which encapsulates the non-linear, expressive dynamics between speaker/creator/writer-producer orientation processes, on the one hand, and, listener/viewer/consumer reception processes, on the other, as well as various interchanges, transformations, and impacts charging these communicative actions, as the two ends discursively feed into each other in overlapping, multivalenced ways. Film scholar Rick Altman calls this complex rhetorical dimension "pragmatic," noting that, in addition to functioning semiotically (Frow's "thematic" aspect) and syntactically (Frow's "formal" aspect), genres serve as a real-life "site of struggle and co-operation among multiple users" which their practice ideologically becomes a "complex process involving not only hegemonic complicity across user groups but also a feedback system connecting user groups."³² This process advances both the replication of social structure (hegemonic complicity) and the potential for structural change to re-channel human agency (feedback system). For the purposes of my project, though many other televisionary tactics of this rhetorical or pragmatic genre dimension exist for academic study,³³ I will focus on the business and economic aspects of exercising genre: genre as discursive praxis within specific, usually hierarchically organized or financially restrictive, socio-economic contexts that distribute power unevenly among diverse user groups (writers, directors, producers, showrunners, performers, production crew members, viewers, studio/network heads, funders/financiers/benefactors, media critics, and so on). I take my inspiration from the work of Altman, whose political-economic analyses of the historical development of classic Hollywood film genres instructed me about, in his words, "the difficulty of extracting ... textual structures from the institutions and social habits that frame them and lend them the appearance of making meaning on their own."³⁴ How television narrative artists wield genre discourse pragmatically, in the context of extra-textual variables such as show ratings, popular TV trends, advertiser and corporate sponsorship pressure, industry race/gender/class stratification, production budgets, marketing and social

media innovations, ideological repression, and technological change will constitute a recurrent inquiry in my analyses.

Taking my cue once more from *Black Jesus*, I find it helpful to explore how economic factors—such as acceptable/popular trends within the evolving Third Golden Age television show market—form a broader cultural field within which the series’ showrunners/co-creators had to orient their exercise of genre, to sell what could have been a highly unmarketable, unpitchable series. What would that cultural field be? As argued earlier, contemporary viewers of scripted TV in the US have been trained over the past two decades of the media’s evolution, during what has been widely touted as the best television era thus far, not to think of issues of social mobility and social stratification among the working and lower classes through anything *other than* (1) a romanticized, encouraging, Horatio-Algeresque vision of upward mobility as possible with the right amount of individual pluck and effort;³⁵ or (2) an equally romanticized, but cynical, nihilistic, and pessimistic, perspective about the systemic lack of class mobility, or about the damning inevitability of downward mobility, that effectively encourages acceptance and reification of the current economic system.³⁶ Realistic but hopeful television portrayals of working-class and lower-class American characters whose goals are daily survival and familial or neighborly camaraderie *in the context of their economic communities*—a hallmark of the preceding Second Golden Age of TV a few decades ago—remain comparatively rare in this third era of “revolutionary” US television, despite the wider availability of channels and platforms.³⁸

In the Third Golden Age, this unpopularity of grounded, detailed, class-conscious television series that emphasize poor and working-class characters’ small daily efforts at social mobility and sheer existence; that illustrate the quotidian, erosive consequences of class struggle and the creative and spiritual strength marshaled to survive it; and that point to social stratification structures in the US as a central element behind their shows’ premise can be witnessed by studying development and ratings-rat-race³⁹ patterns of new series over the past few years. Failed fictional-television series with these class-centric themes, such as shows that only ran one or two seasons due to comparatively low ratings, include: the dramedy *How to Make It In America* (HBO TV, 2010-2011), about two hustling, “downtown” entrepreneurs trying to break into New York City’s fashion industry, drumming up small deals through street contacts, as they fend off their ex-con loan shark and struggle in the “non-stop hustle” and “non-stop grind”⁴⁰ of tough urban business—executive-produced by

actor-producer Mark Wahlberg (a former juvenile delinquent from the streets of Boston, who modeled, rapped, and acted his way into the Hollywood elite); workplace sitcom *Ground Floor* (TBS Network, 2013-2015), which contrasted the lives of CEOs and managers employed at the top floor of a corporation with those of blue-collar workers and support staff at the ground level;⁴² well-reviewed ethnic comedy *Cristela* (ABC TV, 2014-2015), which juxtaposed the home life of a lower-middle-class, Mexican American, law student and her working-class family and community with the world of upper-middle-class, WASP and Jewish attorneys;⁴³ and, finally, a community sitcom that never made it to the prime-time TV schedule, *Downwardly Mobile*, about a woman who manages a mobile home community, becoming a surrogate mother to its diverse residents.⁴⁴ It is significant to note that the creators/showrunners of these series had special motivation to portray working-class and poor characters on prime-time television: they identify as growing up within working-class families and communities; Malins experienced working-class jobs in his twenties; and Wahlberg and Barr had extensive, respected, previous TV track records in bringing stories of working-class characters to the small screen. While *Ground Floor* seems to have reproduced hegemonic stereotypes of the wealthy and the laboring classes⁴⁵—discerning television critics such as Brian Lowry of *Variety* magazine called out its showrunners for not rising to the challenge of the fertile premise, in a post-Occupy, anti-1-percenter, viewing climate in which economic stratification had become a viable media topic, making the time ripe to explore class conflict in popular US discourse, even within a sitcom⁴⁶—both *How to Make It in America* and *Cristela*, in their episodes' narrative arcs, emphasized the wide economic and cultural gaps that made true upward mobility difficult and unpredictable, despite working-class characters' intelligence, adaptive strategies, and hard work. And *Downwardly Mobile* returned irascible comedy genius Roseanne Barr to an earlier career strategy of appealing to poor America, presenting, according to media observers of the pilot's development process, a “working class ethic” that “could resonate with viewers in difficult economic times.”⁴⁷

Against this environment of mainstream televisionary hostility against class-oriented scripted shows, *Black Jesus* showrunner and co-creator McGruder played some genre tricks when arranging development of the series. Around 2013-2014, McGruder cut an off-books deal with Cartoon Network, which had been showing original episodes and reruns of his *Boondocks* animated series on their late-night, Adult Swim, block of programming off and on since 2005. He forged the deal from his ongoing relationship with Mike Lazzo, Senior

Executive Vice President and creative director of Adult Swim, who had originally discovered *Boondocks* as a failed Fox pilot and given McGruder relatively free reign to tell his *anime*-styled stories at Adult Swim in 2004. McGruder would leave the favorably received cartoon show to create a new, live-action, comedy series at Adult Swim. This agreement would accomplish two economic goals, genre-wise: it would help Adult Swim aggressively build its new, growing block of live-action TV shows—a trend which Lazzo had started around 2010, with Adult Swim’s broadcast of the satirical show *Children’s Hospital*, but which the programming block had not managed with much success or critical acclaim;; and it would help McGruder move his writing career (which up until then, had been mainly in cartoon strips and animated shows), transmedially, into non-animated, scripted TV and perhaps eventually let him return to film,ⁱ⁴⁸ broadening his brand into new platforms, and with them, new story possibilities explored in different audiences and markets.

Adult Swim under Lazzo provided an ideal cultural field within which McGruder could attempt this religiously and racially transgressive, boldly class-centric show. From its creation in 2001, the daily, over-night block of Cartoon Network programming had established a grammar of the hiply defiant audio-visual languages of uncensored late-night US cable television, usually rated-R-to-unrated in content. Consisting of edgy short videos, experimental shows, adult *anime*, sex-drugs-and-violence-heavy re-dubbings of old children’s cartoons, and weird avant-garde film clips, it offered a relatively non-commercial rhetorical broadcast situation that allowed the two auteurs very wide expressive discretion over how to intersect the show’s formal and thematic aspects of genre.⁴⁹ McGruder’s long relationship with Adult Swim and established status among its viewer demographic allowed him the freedom to select and bring in as a partner the more experienced feature film and TV director Clattenburg.⁵⁰ This arrangement reflects a power dynamic opposite of that behind the business-as-usual practice in the mainstream television industry, where a network usually selects its own, more seasoned, co-showrunner/executive producer to guide (and, more often than not, supplant⁵¹) the newbie showrunner who created and/or developed the show’s basic premise;; it is not usually the less experienced creator/showrunner who decides upon his own co-showrunner/mentor. Clattenburg had worked both on several class-oriented, poverty- or economy-themed Canadian television series (not just the *Trailer Park Boys* TV shows and films, which are his best-known creation, but he also brought his experience on the scripted dramatic series *Pit Pony*, about a family of Nova Scotian coal

miners at the turn of the last century, and on the anti-corporate, teen educational show *Street Cents*, which gave young viewers tools of consumer awareness, with which to fight media advertising) and on comedic shows (especially *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*, a mock news show in the satirical vein of *Saturday Night Live*, *The Colbert Report*, and *The Daily Show*), so part of his genre resume paralleled that of McGruder semiotically, aesthetically, and politically.⁵² This optimal auteurist's genre-matching situation was strongly enabled by Lazzo's idiosyncratic management style. The longtime Turner Broadcasting System⁵³ network executive, generally beloved among Cartoon Network writers, animators, directors, and performers for his strong working relationships with creative laborers, follows the business strategy of building long-term connections with artists by choosing them carefully, then letting them take the risk with their shows' content and narrative styles, so long as they produce buzzworthy, marketable, or innovative results.⁵⁴ As a result, Adult Swim became one of the prominent venues for subversive genre expression and genre experimentation among young narrative artists in TV, as well as increasingly popular among the coveted youth demographic of viewers, allowing for the unusual Third Golden Age phenomenon of *Black Jesus* to exist and its subversive showrunners to continue to storytell.⁵⁵

“Doing” Fantastic Genre: Scripted Tv By Black Auteurs As An Entryway To This Diversity Project

As a black American televisual auteur, McGruder stands among a generation of Afroscripiter and Afrocinematic colleagues who must do “twice as much to get half as far” in their dealings with the predictable workplace racism, classism, and heterosexism of US television—in the catchphrase of powerful television producer Shonda Rhimes in her edgy (if neoliberalist) paean to black excellence, *Scandal*. He joins the ranks of African American Peak TV scripted series showrunners and/or show creators such as ABC's Thursday-evening-prime-time-dominating Rhimes (*Private Practice*, *How to Get Away With Murder*, *Station 19*, *For the People*), cable-network power couple Mara Brock Akil and Salim Akil (*Girlfriends*, *The Game*, *Being Mary Jane*), married filmmaking team Gina Prince-Blythewood and Reggie Rock Blythewood (*Shots Fired*), longtime TV producer and writer Felicia D. Henderson (*Soul Food*), filmmaker-cum-TV-producer Lee Daniels (*Empire*, *Star*), performer/musician Queen Latifah (*Single Ladies*, also *Star*), performer/musician Jamie Foxx and film director Tim Story (*White*

Famous), groundbreaking black cinema auteur John Singleton (*Snowfall*), performer Lena Waithe and longtime movie director Rick Famuyiwa (*The Chi*), comedy writers Kenya Barris and Larry Wilmore (*'black*ish*), producer Janine Sherman Barrois (*Claws*, coproduced with performer Rashida Jones), performer Donald Glover and his sibling Stephen Glover (*Atlanta*), performer Issa Rae (*Insecure*, also with Larry Wilmore), rapper Calvin Broadus (aka Snoop Dogg, *Mary + Jane*), and beloved film director Ava Du Vernay (*Queen Sugar*), who collectively form a wave of both seasoned entertainment-industry veterans and community-based newcomers. Like McGruder, these writing, producing, and directing auteurs paired established commercial genre conventions with Afrocentric experiments in content, aesthetics, and audience appeal.

In this project's first chapter, I have taken my initial cue from these black artistic survivors of creative industry, whose genre experimentations suggest the true potential of fantastic narrative modes on television as part of a continuous language of ethnic-minority community and regional culture, *not* as a separate, geeky, white-male-dominated subculture produced within commercial narrative platforms (e.g. science fiction and fantasy books, videogames, horror films, Marvel comics/movies). Working in US television from the 1990s, the Blythewoods, who made black films as they also ventured into television writing and production; the Akils, who mastered showrunning on proto- and free-cable networks such as UPN, BET, and the CW; and Henderson, who served as a rare black woman to run TV series (*Sister, Sister*) prior to the start of the Third Golden Age; generally stuck with the rules of realism-based genre television, that is, very troped situation comedies or very mainstream dramas.⁵⁶ Their community-based directive: use realistic genre-storytelling techniques to depict black people as diverse human beings demonstrating real social issues via the scripted televisual form, entertaining and empathizing with black audiences and drawing in white ones. However, from the early 2000s, Rhimes' sometimes goofy genre play in her monster-hit medical drama *Grey's Anatomy*—which included formal contributions such as the songtage, a short audio montage or series of shots bridging multiple storylines, and a whole season where one character appeared as a ghost in an otherwise grounded series⁵⁸—subtly imported fantastical devices into the longtime, if staid, medical-drama form. A fan of groundbreaking genre TV shows such as *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer*, and a knowledgeable student of the televisual form, especially the 1990s fantastic playfield where late-night genre-bending sf-action ruled (e.g. Sam Raimi and Rob Tapert's *Xena: Warrior Princess* and *Hercules*:

The Legendary Journeys), Rhimes experimented with prime-time conventions by attempting, as *Buffy* and *Xena* had successfully assayed with their niche audiences, a musical episode. However, unlike those shows which featured “pretty” and skinny heterosexual white women as their song-centered episode’s stars, hers focused upon Dr. Callie Torres, a bisexual-lesbian, Latina, large-bodied character (“Song Beneath the Song,” Season 7, Episode 18, 2011). While some of these genre tests were welcomed by her network and ABC’s liberal to libertarian, mainstream-professional audience (for instance, the musical episode drew mixed reviews but solid ratings), many of Rhimes’ other efforts flew below the critical radar, unevaluated or underevaluated as explicit engagements with fantastic genre, and still others—including the fan-despised, season-long ghost—became widely reviled.⁵⁹

Rhimes’ early-Peak-TV experimentations, however messy aesthetically and mixed in terms of critical responses, opened the door for second-phase-of-the-Golden-Age showrunners such as African American brothers the Glovers, who showrun the acclaimed cable series *Atlanta* (2015-present) on FX, and black women Barrois and Jones, who, with Jones’ producing partner Will McCormack, co-executive-produce the critical-darling crime series *Claws* (2017-present) for TNT. Unlike Rhimes, who worked within a TV market in which few African American showrunners, much less female or other minority ones, produced prime-time shows, and who thus worked largely within entrenched dramatic-realist and dramedic forms, the Glovers wielded enough post-Black-Lives-Matter cultural authority within the mid-2010s creative labor market to draw from deep traditions of black experimentalism and “chocolate surrealism.” This changed market allowed them to depict a fairly regionalized “ATL” of poor and working-class black characters who on the surface seem to fit mainstream televisual stereotypes (drug dealers, irrational criminals, annoyed/abandoned single mothers, rap-business thuggery and frontin’); however, through the series’ beloved narrative style, the Glovers (working with director-producer Hiro Murai) complicate and contextualize these characters’ development and story world via surrealistic, even anarchistic, adventures into the city’s unpredictable subcultures. Also bolstered by the FX network’s pro-auteur (i.e. relatively un-bureaucratic) approach to developing shows as well as by the proven commercialism of the network’s other lightly avant-garde series such as *Louie*, *Better Things*, and *Baskets*, Season 2 of *Atlanta*, subtitled “Robbin’ Season,” utilizes regional folklore, horror, and satire, in a minimalist yet non-realistic portrayal of the southern area’s criminality. In every episode, someone is robbed (“robbin’ season,” according to a

character, serves as a synonym for the holidays, when people desperately need cash to sustain their community and family relationships). However, the unwinding of the episodes transpires in a way that surprises audiences, such as an ex-thug standing off against the local police who surround his house, because their main fear is not the unregistered golden gun that he might (and does) keep hidden within the broken-down building, so much as the pet alligator which has become larger than life in the neighborhood's black gossip network. Or the narrative teases viewer stereotypes in the way that the hero Earn (Donald Glover)—a Princeton-educated genius who returns to his African American rural-south community after dropping out of the Ivy League college and who starts to manage his cousin, local pot dealer Paper Boi (aka Alfred, played by Brian Tyree Henry), in launching a promising hip-hop career—finds himself and Paper Boi surrounded by the rapper's white-fratboy listeners, while the black friends range around the countryside in a desperate search for marijuana during impromptu escape from angry female fans. The polite, starstruck collegians offer the musical team a J while brutally hazing their hood-covered, naked, white fraternity recruits., In a stunningly visual scene Earn and Paper Boi smoke this offering on the frat house's living-room couch, composed in a wide shot before the house's large Confederate flag, with the bare white butts of the fraternabees framing the foreground, all the while listening to the hazer's adoring analyses of Paper Boi's music (Season 2, Episode 9, "North of the Border," 2018).

Such sophisticated, complex uses of fantastic audio-visual narrative within ethnic-TV storytelling also is practiced by black female showrunner Barrois, who draws on her African American producing colleague Jones's knowledge of the links between surrealism and comedy, to depict a multiracial Manatee County in the multicultural crime dramedy *Claws*, set amidst the desperation of Floridian strip mall work culture, among the boom-or-bust service economy of the Sunshine State, starring middle-aged black comedy actress Niecy Nash. Nash's heroine Desna, owner of the struggling small business "Nail Artists of Manatee County," works in personal services, an industrial sector known for women making more money than men. With her crew of multiracial, mostly 40-and-over, nail-artist employees, she engages all her wits to escape the control of the local "Dixie mafia," a regional mob run by men with patriarchal (but not heteronormative, as the leader, Uncle Daddy, is a gay white male in a polyamorous relationship) values which uses her salon as part of an elaborate, if crude, money-laundering and opioid-selling empire. Barrois, who as showrunner executed

Laurence's original vision of a Floridian, Elmore-Leonard-meets-Carl-Hiiasen-like, comically grotesque criminal underworld with her own contributions as a black-LatinX woman, added to the formal language of the series a regular surrealistic touch. Almost every episode contains a playful moment of musical or dreamlike spectacle, usually non-narrative, which Barrois says the TV team uses to highlight the unbelievable nature of this bizarre criminal world, as well as—no doubt—give her female characters a break from the dramatic tension, violence, and high stakes of their business adventures. These fantastical moments feel like Rhimes' songtages, but they much more resemble cinematic, non-narrative spectacle, in both their extensive usage of screen time and refusal of building plot. The first such moment appears in Episode 1, "Tirana," when Quiet Ann (Judy Reyes), the "butch" blacktina enforcer of Desna's loyal crew, dances joyfully to Latin X music while sweeping up the shop (2017), during which the story's plot stops and the moment holds for several minutes, without followup narrative explication. This slow scene adds to the televisual language of the opening seconds of this pilot, when the audience watched Desna, her white-trash-ish BFF Jennifer (Jenn Lyon), her brightly sociopathic ex-con compatriot Polly (the effervescent Carrie Preston), and Quiet Ann take turns strutting up and down a strip mall parking lot before each other, whistling and yodeling encouragement to their peers, turning it into a supermodel's catwalk, their middle-aged and working-class but stunningly glamorized bodies redefining televisual spectacle itself as feminist, anti-ageist, and body-positive. Like former rapper Snoop Dogg, whose *Mary + Jane* (MTV, 2017) uses surrealist comedic modes to offer, for instance, an episode where one of two financially desperate, white-girl pot dealers gets high on liquid marijuana and starts hearing her vagina talk (mostly complaints: "Snatcherlorette," Season 1, Episode 3, 2016), Barrois in *Claws* blends complicated genre mixes of satire, fantasy, and naturalism to highlight the un-real, non-real, and ultra-real subjective elements of today's weird economy.

As I started to write this dissertation, I picked up my church newspaper, which told me, quite appropriately, that "The brain can only absorb what the butt can endure...10% Talk and 90% Do."⁵⁹ Like McGruder and Clattenburg, and their fictional counterpart, Jee, *doing genre* is the thing.

Notes

1. Communicology, an “embodied discourse,” is a late 2000s intellectual movement to re-orient the scholarly discipline of communication, with new emphases on praxis and empiricism, towards a self-reflexive understanding of how discourse operates in different socio-political context. It marries the humanistic approaches of postmodernism, semiotics, and critical theory with positivism of social-scientific methodology, drawing heavily upon phenomenological study of real-life discursive practice (Eicher-Catt and Catt 2010).

2. A dramedy is a modern TV/film tragicomedy, a form developed in the Second Golden Age of Television with sitcoms that contained serious thematic, formal, and rhetorical aspects (*MASH*; *Good Times*; *Barney Miller*, *All in the Family*). However, the exact balance between funny and serious might vary, depending upon the platform, media system, genre/s, episode, and scene.

3. Perhaps the most class-conscious dramas influenced by über-producer Dick Wolf’s *Law and Order* multi-series franchise and by Simon’s work are *Southland* (2009-2013, NBC and TNT) and *Third Watch* (1999-2005, NBC).

4. A thinly disguised, fictionalized version of the Manny Pacquiao v. Floyd Mayweather, Jr. fight, broadcast from the MGM Grand Garden Arena, Las Vegas, on May 2, 2015, for which US cable companies charged a record-breaking \$100 per showing for customers to watch from their homes in the pay-per-view format.

5. As my parameters for the Second Golden Age, I am partially using TV scholar-historian Robert J. Thompson’s delineation of this Golden Age as roughly transpiring from 1981-1994, marked by the tremendous formal contributions of televisual innovator Steven Bochco with the groundbreaking multi-protagonist cop drama *Hill Street Blues* (1981-1987, NBC) on one end, and by the pilot of fiction-author-turned-filmmaker Michael Crichton’s *ER* (1994-2009, NBC), on the other. See Thompson (1997).

However, as this timeline reflects the naturalized primacy of Hollywood dramatic realism, wherein critically beloved, “serious” audiovisual artworks reflect little to no storytelling traditions of laughter and lightness, nor fantastic-genre experimentation, I have adjusted this era’s start to include the 1970s, a period of tremendous aesthetic invention in situation comedies, comedy-hybridized crime shows, and dramedic proto-superhero shows, in which the form of “funny” substantially evolved due to pioneers Norman Lear, Garry Marshall, Richard Levinson and William Link, Harve Bennett, and Aaron Spelling, among others. I mark the start of this Second Golden Age with the TV networks’ “rural purge,”

widely seen as occurring at the end of the 1970-1972 season, which ushered in the formal shift to 1960s-era “relevance,” as an artistic rather than only a thematic movement, within US television—a genre movement that originated in highly episodic comedy and dramedic crime shows, not in realistic and highly serialized dramas like *Hill Street Blues*. The rural purge ended the 1960s trend of TV series about working-class rural white people (*The Andy Griffith Show*, *Green Acres*, *Lassie*) with urban professional women’s situation comedies (*The Mary Tyler Moore Show*) and urban people of color sitcoms. For more on the rural purge, see Harkins (2004).

6. See McChesney (2001).

7. See Piven (2014).

8. To get a sense of the deeply structural nature of stratification in the US, reflecting both political parties’ entrenched, pro-corporate policies from the late twentieth century through the millennium prior to the 2008 financial crisis, see Piven’s 2014 summary: “In the six years preceding that (the Great Recession’s ‘beginning’ of 2007-2009), the poverty rate actually increased for the first time on record during an economic recovery, from 11.7 percent in 2001 to 12.5 percent in 2007. Poverty rates for single mothers in 2007 were 50 percent higher in the United States than in fifteen other high-income countries. Black employment rates and income were declining before the recession struck in 2007.”

9. See Stiglitz (2013).

10. Klein and other public intellectuals/business historians specializing in neoliberalism have foregrounded the direct influence of the Chicago School of Economics and the work of *laissez-faire*-economics proponent Milton Friedman in the formation of the repressive global states. For example, the Pinochet government in Chile (1973-1990) operated as a *de facto* testing ground for late-twentieth-century neoliberal policies, lessons later applied by elites in other post-/neo-colonial states (China, South Africa, Russia, Poland, different Latin American nations, etc.) who used the power of unfettered capitalism—i.e. market deregulation/liberalization, repatriation and/or reprivatization of national resources, pro-globalization “free” trade agreements, and cronyist or corporatist governments—in addition to state-sponsored violence, government coups, and political openings created by natural disasters, as counter-revolutionary force against poor and working-class masses of the world. See Klein (2008).

11. See Piketty (2014), especially chapters from Part III (“The Structure of Inequality”: 237-470)—2 (“Inequality of Labor Income”), 3 (“Inequality of Capital Ownership”), and 4 (“Merit and Inheritance in the Long Run”)—which together use historical, global data on income and wealth inequality, to show how neoliberal arguments about the importance of hard work, merit, ingenuity, and effort in determining one’s social class weaken in the face of statistical evidence on the continued salience of wealth of one’s class of origin (over income earned partly through individual educational achievement) and on the enduring power of one’s class-based inheritance in reproducing that wealth (as well as shaping one’s income-earning potential).

12. The first journalist to write of this televisual era with significant impact was Emily Nussbaum (2009) who called the aughts a “decade when TV grew a spine and a brain.”

13. For a sampling of recent scholarly debates over “quality” (Third Golden Age) television’s evaluative standards, conditions of emergence, and formal/thematic traits, see *Quality TV: Contemporary American Television and Beyond* (Reading Contemporary Television), Janet McCabe and Kim Akass, eds., 2007 (New York, NY: I.B. Taurus & Co. Ltd.) and *Quality Popular Television: Cult TV, the Industry and Fans* (BFI Modern Classics), Mark Jancovich and James Lyons, eds., 2008 (London, UK: British Film Institute); for a more thorough and theoretical discussion of the formal elements constituting “complex (narrative) TV,” see Jason Mittell’s *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*, 2015 (New York, NY: NYU Press). For a general-audience, celebratory take on the inventiveness it took for showrunners/creators to produce/depict Third Golden Age, (mostly) middle-class, (mostly) white-male, anti-heroic, dramatic protagonists, see Brett Martin’s *Difficult Men: Behind the Scenes of a Creative Revolution: From The Sopranos and The Wire to Mad Men and Breaking Bad*, 2014 (New York: Penguin Books); for a similarly glowing and general-audience, rough genealogy of influential, prime-time (mostly) dramas prior to and during this period, see Alan Sepinwall’s *The Revolution was Televised: The Cops, Crooks, Singers, and Slayers Who Changed TV Drama Forever*, 2013 (New York, NY: Touchstone). The last is relevant to my project, as it recognizes the impact of generally disregarded fantastic-genre work (*Battlestar Galactica*, *Lost*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*) within this body of “quality” TV.

14. See Ginsburg (2008).

15. A recent, thorough, region-by-region mapping of international media concentration patterns can be found in the summary of cross-national research of 30 nations and 13 media industries, covered over 10-25 years, orchestrated by Noam (2016).

16. John Frow, *Genre: The New Critical Idiom*, 2006 (London: Routledge).

17. Ibid.

18. For example: in “The Second Coming of Black Jesus” (September 17, 2015), Jess Peacock, reporter for progressive religious news site *Religion Dispatches*, commends the show as “an important exercise in theological exploration, examining questions about faith and skepticism, the uncomfortable (for some) enmeshment of the sacred and the profane, and the idolatry of orthodoxy and tradition that McGruder and Clattenburg consistently deconstruct...”; in “Black Jesus May Drink, Smoke, and Curse, But He’s Still Messiah-ish” (August 3, 2014), *Washington Post* entertainment, race, and gender/sexuality writer Soraya Nadia McDonald evaluated the show’s narrative strategy as, “Like his earthly counterparts, Black Jesus doesn’t have a perfect track record, but he gets the big concepts and leads by example ... (I)f Jesus is just like us, maybe it’s not so much of a stretch for us to be just like him.”

19. See Mittel (2001).

20. Mittel (ibid) urges TV researchers to address television genre in terms of discursive formations, or “historically specific systems of thought, conceptual categories that work to define cultural experiences within larger systems of power ... that ... do not emerge from a centralized structure or from a single site of power but are built bottom up from disparate micro-instances.”

21. These terms and parenthetical examples are all from Mittel 8.

22. Especially, where Bacchilega, who traces oral versus print versions of folk tales and fairy tales for comparative gender analyses via close readings of these contrasting versions (1997), first heralds the importance of multiple, especially multi-medial, forms of storytelling; and her more recent, in which she posits her theory of the world-wide fairy-tale web of discursive story practices of wonder (2013).

23. Frow, 9-10. A parallel breakdown of genre dimension is offered by film genre scholar Rick Altman (216-227). As I will note later in the main text, Altman’s “syntactic” dimension is similar to the “formal” one of Frow; his “semantic” aspect of genre mirrors Frow’s “thematic” one; and, though it emphasizes genre effects rather than situation of

address only, Altman's "pragmatic" dimension highlights the same general aspects of real-world orientation, reception, and impact, as Frow's "rhetorical" dimension. To phrase it even more simply: genre structure involves form, content, audience.

24. A sizzle reel is basically a short trailer—using the currently cast performers and costumes and sets that producers are considering for the real run of the show, often cut in short clips excerpted from the pilot episode—made to show network/studio executives and potential advertisers. The reel summarizes the show's concept, key characters, major conflicts, themes, and story situations, in order to sell its story development and/or funding.

25. Some of the showrunning duo's likely intertextual adaptation strategies include likening the character of Maggie to the New Testament's Mary Magdalene, Fish to the apostle Peter, Trayvon to the apostle John, Lloyd to Judas Iscariot, and Lloyd's sometime roommate/friend and neighborhood landlord Vic, the character most consistently hostile to the new urban Jesus, to a Roman or Pharisee.

26. In the narrative grammar of *Black Jesus*, the villains/antagonists of the show generally believe Jesus to be a mentally ill con man, but the other neighborhood characters, especially Jee's crew, demonstrate faith in his claims to be the Son of God, though this belief sometimes wavers. The series' directors, producers, and writers allow Jee to perform an occasional miracle, usually via prayer to his "Pops," but never at the expense of the human characters learning important lessons and doing their own spiritual/moral work, first.

27. Such as: vampirism (*American Horror Story: Hotel*); curses and spells (*Once Upon a Time*); zombification (*The Walking Dead*); brain-optimizing pills (*Limitless*); precognition (*Minority Report*); inter-dimensional teleportation (*Agents of Shield*); galactic alien abilities (*Supergirl*); superpowers (*Flash*); occult-driven time travel (*Sleepy Hollow*); and so on.

28. *Mise-en-scène* refers to visual, as well as audio-visual, elements of TV production that (1) directors, producers, performers, writers, and other television artists together create for an overall look/tonal journey of a television text, that (2) viewers next consume and receive/interpret; both processes filtered through genre frameworks. It typically involves acting/performance, production design, costume/make-up, sound/music, and various technical cinematographic and editing aspects, such as space/composition/blocking, lighting and color, aspect ratio/film stock, shot length, and pacing.

29. "Fish and the Con Man," Episode 2, Season 1 (2014).

30. "Good for Nothing," Episode 10, Season 2 (2015).

31. “I Gave at the Playground,” Episode 5, Season 1 (2014).

32. Rick Altman, *Film/Genre*, 1999 (London: BFI Publishing: 211).

33. Common creative practices by fictional-TV show directors/producers/writers, that might also be addressed through analyzing the rhetorical dimension of genre structure, include: orienting stories towards fan bases and fan cultures (e.g. the “shipping” of popular characters that fans wish to see in a romance); intertextual tale-telling within an episode by referencing scenes/symbols from other TV shows/films, which fellow artists working in television or cinema, or knowledgeable fans, will decode to enjoy the homage’s hidden citations (e.g. a November 2015 installment of the sci-fi/FBI-procedural series *Limitless*, about torture and black ops on US soil, structured the entire story around Easter-egg references to the teen comedy *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off*); and consciously depicting—or parodying—recognizable real-life trends or current events in scripted episodes, so that mainstream viewers will grasp the show’s relevance or regard it as hip (e.g. the *Law and Order* multi-series storyverse’s famous, “ripped from the headlines,” story strategy).

34. Altman *ibid.*

35. Case in point: the racist, classist, sometimes homophobic, workplace/female-buddy sitcom—co-created by Michael Patrick King (former showrunner of *Sex in the City*) and comedienne Whitney Cummings—*Two Broke Girls* (2011-present, CBS TV), where one of the titular twenty-something characters grew up poor (Max, played by Kat Dennings) and the other was raised wealthy but recently lost all her money (Caroline, played by Beth Behrs). Though both work in a Brooklyn diner as waitresses, the rich girl’s character perspective tends to dominate, as the members of the diner’s working-class neighborhood are portrayed “colorfully,” in a painfully old-school, pre-Civil-Rights-era manner, that might approximate her personal worldview: Korean restaurant owner Han Lee (played by Matthew Moy), whose character—the show constantly reminds us—is ignorant of US culture, effeminate (though straight-identifying), and shorter than the two white female leads; African American cashier Earl (played by Garrett Morris), a laid-back gambler, pot-head, and retired musician; Ukrainian short-order cook Vanko Oleg Golishevsky (played by Jonathan Kite), the workplace sexual harasser and stereotypically macho Russian immigrant; and Polish Sophie Kaczynski (played by Jennifer Coolidge), a sexually expressive, but maternal, small-business woman. Needless to say, the comedy has been extensively criticized in the media for its broad American ethnocentrism and outright racism, to say nothing of its occasional anti-

Semitic or rape jokes. Influenced by 1970s working-class sitcom *Laverne and Shirley* (1976-1983, ABC TV), which presented two working-class, ethnic-white girls employed at a Milwaukee brewery (played with Vaudevillian energy by Penny Marshall and Cindy Williams), *Two Broke Girls* distinguishes itself thematically from the earlier comedy from the Second Golden Age of TV, by emphasizing its “girls” earnest efforts at upward mobility, in the form of their nascent cupcake business which they hope will make them wealthy some day, in contrast with *Laverne and Shirley*, where the female co-protagonists’ stories mostly featured romance and shenanigans with various idiosyncratically humorous members of their ethnic/class community. To underscore the two broke girls’ attempts at upping their socio-economic status, the end of each episode even tallies how much money they now have in the bank, presenting that dollar amount (which might rise or fall in the next episode), with a cash-register “ching” sound effect, in the closing shot. In the Third Golden Age, the “broke” often cannot stay broke, because the US viewing public, living within an economic era marked by globalization and heightened domestic stratification structures, needs to be reminded of its old, upward-mobility mythologies.

36. For example, the early Third Golden Age cable-TV trend of lower-middle-class, white American anti-heroes and “anti-heroines,” who end up “slumming it” among the underclass (usually people of color), when the former has to stoop to various crimes, usually illegal drug-dealing or unethical work practices, to make ends meet or to scratch an egotistical/power-hungry/emotionally damaged itch [*Breaking Bad*; *Weeds*; *Nurse Jackie*; *Saving Grace*]. This inelegant (plus usually racist and classist) technique exploits the economic reality of poverty and of socially disorganized communities towards narrative “innovation,” especially in the competitive scripted-TV landscape, characterized by what has been described by privileged white auteurs as “narrative exhaustion,” i.e. all the white-middle-class-people’s conventionally genred plots and character types—that of heroic or noble teachers, attorneys, doctors, and heterosexual parents—have been used to death, so let’s take a run at portraying what might happen to nice white characters, when they are made to slum-it within the ghetto/underclass/black market. For a series of trenchant critiques by African American media bloggers, filmmakers, and narrative artists about white film/TV/media artists’ whining about “narrative exhaustion” in the Digital Age—namely, the public complaints of white-male Hollywood insiders Paul Schraeder (former A-list screenwriter of *Taxi Driver*, *American Gigolo*, and *The Last Temptation of Christ*; director of *Mishima*), George

Clooney (star of the *Oceans Eleven* film series, and producer-director of *Good Night, and Good Luck*), and Ari Handel (directing auteur Darren Aronofsky's writing partner, who wrote scripts for Aronofsky's acclaimed films *Noah*, *Black Swan*, and *The Wrestler*)—of getting forced to adapt to a media market wrung out by “too many stories already being told,” by figuring out how to tell *only* white people's stories in “fresh” ways, rather narratives featuring characters or communities of color. See op-ed pieces in *Shadow and Act*, the critical-theory-influenced African American column within *Indiewire* film journal, especially those by Malcolm Woodard and Tambay A. Obenson.

37. As opposed to the stock, usually stereotypical, poor or working-class character as a fish-out-of-water managing to “pass” as normal, within a largely middle- or upper-middle-class community of other characters, usually of professional-status employment, such as doctors, lawyers, government workers/officials, and business people (e.g. series borrowing from *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*). Also, as opposed to shows modeled upon the 1990s ratings blockbuster *Friends*, about (usually white) young people, raised in the middle or upper class, who temporarily undergo working-class status (usually sharing unrealistically large and expensively decorated, urban apartments with each other), due to their youth, their abundance of college student loans or lack of post-college white-collar work, and/or recent leaving of the nest of their family of origin.

38. An interesting exception might be the workplace/industry drama, a multi-protagonist, night-time soap opera of the *Upstairs, Downstairs* variety, that offers contrasting peeks into the lives of the rich and the poor, with the connecting factor as employment of the latter by the former (*Downton Abbey*; *The Haves and the Have-Nots*). Reaching its heyday during the Second Golden Age of TV, with shows such as *Dallas*, *Dynasty*, and *Falcon Crest* tallying up hundreds of episodes, to take their place among the longest-running scripted series in US television history, this genre illustrates working-class and poor people in economic and sexual—even intimate and familial—relationships with the wealthy, in ways largely empathetic with the former groups. However, critical views of production relations, or of capitalism as a *system* of inequality, commonly give way to inflated romantic or business plots involving unrealistically dramatic exploits, by stereotypically good v. evil heroines/heroes and villainesses/villains, in these narratives—and viewers are usually deprived of an extensive peek into the regular lives and intra-relational communities of the poor and working-class, compared to the rich and upper-middle-class, characters,

encouraged to ogle the latter's lives enviously for their luxurious fashion and decadent spending habits. However, in the second decade of the Third Golden Age, the 2010s, the workplace/industry night-time drama displays greater potential for thematic subversion, even formal transformation, as producers' innovative generic matches for it—such as pairing it with the Latin American *telenovela* (*Ugly Betty*; *Devious Maids*; *Happyland*); with industry/scientific historical fiction (*Halt and Catch Fire*; *Masters of Sex*; *The Knick*); or with the gonzo, new wave of gangster/crime-story hybrids (mixed with the superhero origins tale in *Gotham*; with the school/classroom/campus teaching-workplace comedy in *Community* and *Glee*; and with the multi-protagonist, growing-family-business story, including Shakespearean succession drama in *Sons of Anarchy*, black comedy in *The Sopranos*, or the “hip-hopera” musical in *Empire*)—allow more breathing room, from which this tried-and-true, as-old-as-TV-itself, genre might launch critical explorations of the US class system and capitalist economy, though it is far too early to tell. Reboots of 1980s workplace-or industry-based soaps have yielded mixed results; the new *Dallas* was canceled by TNT after two years, while the new *Dynasty* has been moved, at the time of this writing, by the CW to the dreaded “Friday night death slot.”

39. “Ratings rat race” refers to the grueling, “new TV season,” evaluative process of freshman shows being distributed over their platforms—usually starting from September or January, but even as late as October or March (or, for summer shows, beginning from May onward)—then constantly getting evaluated, week by week, by networks, studios, investors, and media news outlets, for the purpose of corporate decisions over cancellations, over rescheduling shows to different times/days, and over renewed valuation of the TV performers/showrunners/ genres/narrative styles/etc. in play. Salient assessment standards include the value of episodes' content, measured through critic reviews in leading industry magazines/blogs and in quality aggregators such as Rotten Tomatoes and Metacritic, and audience ratings, measured through Nielsen Live and other (Live Plus Same-Day, Live Plus 7, etc.) viewing demographics [against other new shows, against same-night/same-time-slotted series, against shows of the same genre or same audience, against shows produced by the same network/studio, and so on], especially among the coveted 18-49 age bracket. However, social media is rapidly becoming a measuring stick to determine shows' popularity and economic power, especially indicated by the number of posts generated during an episode, as fan-friendly series such as Shonda Rhimes' TGIT shows (Thursday evening's

prime-time lineup on ABC TV: *Grey's Anatomy*, *Scandal*, *How to Get Away With Murder*, which Rhimes has long bumped in ratings through getting writers and performers to post same-night messages on social media and the ABC-Disney website) and niche-market shows including ABC Family's *Pretty Little Liars* (which has broken historical records for the most tweets produced during live viewing)—change the game in their active courting of young and/or female, viewer demographics via Twitter and other digital platforms.

40. Before *How to Make It In America* was canceled, creator and showrunner Ian Edelman made it clear that the Horatio Alger narrative would not drive his show's arc, and that the protagonists' struggles would reflect the unpredictable realities of street capitalism for workers-turned-would-be-entrepreneurs of the creative class, keeping the spirit "street."

41. Though *Scrubs* featured several working-class and lower-middle-class characters, such as the occasional custodian and nurse, these characters tended to serve minor roles in the narrative, as major plotlines focused largely upon the doctor characters—from heads of departments to surgeons to interns and medical students—as protagonists. By contrast, the set-up of *Ground Floor* promised equal time and narrative attention to the two sets of upper- and working-class characters.

42. Malins, who did not attend college, had walked a different life path than Lawrence, who did attend college, but that the two ended up in the same place, anyway.

43. *Cristela* possesses historical significance, despite its cancellation after the first season; with it, Alonzo became the first Latina to create, write, produce, and star in her own US TV network show.

44. As I write this monograph, Roseanne's new reboot of her old show, *Roseanne*, surprised television executives by achieving a gargantuan prime-time audience on her old network, ABC, despite the surprise of her TV bosses there, who have articulated that they had until then believed that truly working-class oriented comedies would not draw such ratings. For coverage of the digital-era *Roseanne* tweeting controversy, see Chapter 5.

45. Like many other working-class sitcoms in the history of US TV, this show avoided critical and direct stories that addressed socio-economic stratification.

46. Like similar series centered on working-class jobs, this show emphasized the romantic elements rather than the occupational ones.

47. The new *Roseanne*'s contributions have become overshadowed by the star's public support of President Donald Trump and racist tweet patterns, with many reviewers framing

the show's assessment with angry accusations of the betrayal by Roseanne Barr of women, people of color, liberals, etc.—a few of which mention the comedienne's continued efforts at working-class white representation, but most of which do not.

48. Part of McGruder's auteurial brand is that of an astute, tough-minded, progressive, East-Coast-hip-hop-influenced, award-winning writer and speaker about social issues related to race, politics, and culture, both within the African American community and the broader US socio-political milieu. McGruder has been known in the past to publicly criticize BET network for its overly mainstream and commercial orientation.

49. Through somewhat of a fluke, McGruder ended up script-doctoring *Red Tails*, a live-action dramatic feature film about the Tuskegee airmen, for George Lucas from around 2010-2012, as he had earlier gotten the director's attention by satirizing a problematically racist Jar Jar Binks in *The Boondocks*, his nationally syndicated cartoon strip. Lucas ended up mentoring McGruder, eventually giving him his first film screenwriting credit, alongside black novelist and screenwriter John Ridley (whose name, yes, will keep popping up in this dissertation). Having developed his vision of how to optimize storytellers' voices within industrial contexts, from his own teachers and filmmaking peers, such as Italian American movie auteur Francis Ford Coppola, Lucas' mentorship of iconoclastic, independently minded black auteurs such as McGruder and Ridley forms much of the basis of the political model for commercial narrative artists, that I am working with in this project.

50. The teaming up of McGruder and Clattenburg also likely arose due to their similar political attitudes towards the need to represent poor and working-class regional populations.

51. An unfortunately typical example: co-creator/co-showrunner Larry Wilmore (now host of *The Nightly Show*), was replaced after a well-received Season 1 of *The Bernie Mac Show*, even after winning an Emmy for scripting its pilot.

52. Clattenburg also brought directing and show-producing skills, plus musical experience, to *Black Jesus*, having started his media career as a drummer, reporter/interviewer hosting music news, and music-video director.

53. Turner Broadcasting System, itself part of the Time-Warner media empire, is the parent company of Cartoon Network; Lazzo, who ended up at Adult Swim after a lifelong, stereotypical rise—having no college education—from the lowest rungs of TBS's shipping department to his current executive position, credits his risk-friendly leadership style to the

teachings of his own mentor, Ted Turner, himself an idiosyncratic businessman who loved art and admired artists as much as he loved profit-making, and shaped much of southern regional TV in the US, as well as the overall national cable television landscape. Under Turner's mentorship, Lazzo is widely credited for having shaped Cartoon Network and creating the Adult Swim vision from their beginning..

54. The business press's general image of Lazzo is an executive who encourages artistic risk but spends relatively little money on that risk, expanding/extending artists' series if they pan out; this is the opposite of the standard Hollywood studio/network practice of investing lots of cash on a series' production, but notoriously curtailing the risk of its industrial artists, from the get-go.

55. Adult Swim is tremendously popular with millennials, a demographic highly attractive to advertisers, because young people are considered a lucrative consumer market with lots of disposable income.

56. That is, until relatively recently, when the up-till-then realistic TV and film director Salim Akil developed *Black Lightning* for African American family and US teen audiences with his multiple-showrunning wife Mara Brock Akil (The CW, 2018-present) and Henderson co-executive-produced (but did not showrun) *Fringe* mostly for white nerdy-SF viewers (Fox, 2008-2013) as well as executive-produced *Punisher* for multiracial Marvel fans (Netflix, 2017-present). However, as of the time of this writing, the Blythewoods remain firmly entrenched in showrunning and producing gritty, believable dramas, such as the BLM-themed, multi-protagonist, community crime story, *Shots Fired* (Fox, 2017).

57. Though Britain's multicultural *Holby City* series is generally credited for this formal contribution, Rhimes is recognized for popularizing it on US TV via *Grey's*, even prior to its "artistic" use by white-male showrunning auteurs such as Simon (*The Wire*); Aaron Sorkin (*The West Wing*); or David Chase (*The Sopranos*). See Lawson and also Owen.

58. The "ghost" was that of dead patient Denny Duquette (Jeffrey Dean Morgan), but later episodes revealed this apparition as a manifestation of a brain tumor experienced by Dr. Izzie Stevens (Katherine Heigl), his illicit lover and sometime physician, a plot twist that recovered the generally realistic genre language of the show from its temporary sojourn into fantastic narrative modes.

59. See Yoshinaga (2018a), where I expand on this point by analyzing a two-episode season opener by Rhimes, which engages the Disneyfied fairy-tale paratext surrounding

modern career women's work-life balance, reflecting the liberal-feminist show's ambivalence over that discourse's promises to its US female audiences.

59. See "Dharma by Doing."

CHAPTER 2. INDIGENOUS SCRIPTERS AND DIRECTORS “SCREEN WRITE”
AS INTERNATIONAL IMMATERIAL LABOR
IN THE GREAT GLOBAL FANTASY FACTORY

“Pencils Down!”

—Slogan, Writers Guild of America strike (2007)

**“Setting Up Shop”: A Mercantile Perspective Guides My Analyses Of The WGA’s
Last Labor Action**

The last significant labor action by scriptwriters working in global corporate media, the 2007-2008 Writers Guild of America (WGA) strike, resulted in many lessons about fantastic genre, creative-industry storytelling, and collective mobilization. Led by the president of the union’s most prominent chapter, the WGA-West (WGA-W) teleplay writer-producer Patric Verrone (at the time, executive producer of animated sci-fi series *Futurama* (1999-2013)), the 14-week, two-day strike was marked by high participation of not only science fiction, fantasy, and horror movie scripters and teleplay writers, but also of fantastic-genre TV showrunners (top-level executive producers)—high-ranked screenwriters whose structural positions would, if similar circumstances had arisen within other industries, normally put them on the side of management. Featured in industry-news coverage of this worker action, particularly that by take-no-prisoners feminist Nikki Finke in her *Deadline* (at the time *Deadline Hollywood Daily*) entertainment-sector blog,¹ pro-strike showrunners known as fantastic-genre small-screen auteurs included Joss Whedon, a Hollywood scripter whose career would by the next decade progress to the cinematic writing and directing of superhero blockbusters (i.e. the first two *Avengers* movies in 2012 and 2015; 2017’s *Justice League*) but who at the time of the union action was nerd-embraced as creator of low-rated but fan-favored market-niche television series on yet-incipient networks such as UPN, the WB, and Fox, including *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), *Angel* (1999-2004), and *Firefly* (2002).² Another showrunner notably supporting the strike was Damon Lindelof, then executive producer of ABC’s apocalyptic-sf/Bangsian fantasy crossover hit *Lost* (2004-2010), a writing partner belonging to science fiction film director and television-producing maven J.J.

Abrams' core team; Lindelof would like Whedon rise by the 2010s to mainstream sf-feature writing [notably, franchise-assaying films *Prometheus* (2012), *Star Trek Into Darkness* (2013), and Disney's *Tomorrowland* (2015)].³ A third WGA strike ally was animation powerhouse Seth MacFarlane, whose signature absurdist blend of US-sitcom satire, breakaway musical numbers, and unabashedly "skiffy" fanboy homages (knowingly parodying both *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* storyworlds) would within months of the strike ending result in a record-breaking \$100-million contract with his network, Fox.⁴ Encouraging working writers to support the WGA's protest-literature slogan, "Pencils down!,"⁵ these powerful screenwriters-cum-managers appeared enriched by a *critical fantastical imagination* which valued the artistic contributions of creative-industry workers over any corporate directive for profit achieved through low labor costs.

This project began when I, at the time a community-college sociology and women's studies professor and feeling proud to be a lifelong sf-fantasy nerd, began every morning glued to Finke's detailed online reportage of both rank-and-file screenwriters' accounts and the WGA leadership's perspectives about bargaining-table issues. A fangirl familiar with those writer-producers' fantasy and science fiction TV writing over the past decade, I admired the showrunners' seeming commitment to improving the work conditions of their scripter employees and their apparent refusal to allow their membership in the TV/film studio trade association, the Alliance for Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP: namely, the "management" side), to warp their ethics as writers who cared for other writers. Over the 100 days of the union action, I awoke to a profound realization: "There's something about fantastic genre that's inherently political." When one of the teleplay auteurs, Ronald D. Moore, then executive producer of *Battlestar Galactica* (2004-2009, even publicized the volunteerism of sf-TV fans who had created and sold a pro-WGA t-shirt that quoted the iconic Mr. Spock from *Star Trek: The Original Series* (1966-1969) in his celebrated line from *Star Trek: The Wrath of Khan* (1982), "Logic clearly dictates that the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few" (with "Trekkies support the WGA" printed under a red handprint poised in a Vulcan salute, on the other side), I acquiesced to Moore's recommendation to support this strike-funding effort and found myself click-baiting to make the purchase.⁶

Two subsequent sets of historical events, however, challenged my uncritical perspective of genre-TV showrunners and my limited notions of organized struggle in

Hollywood fantasy production as I launched into a decade-long inquiry into the interrelationship between fantastic genre, scripted television forms, and progressive social change. First, the most prominent screenwriter speaking out against the strike—one who notoriously went “fi-core”⁷ (“financial-core” status within the mandatory union, meaning he exercised his option as a WGA member to continue working during the strike) and who rapidly became vilified in the blogosphere by the 90% white WGA⁸—was African American screenwriter, novelist, and skilled genre-surfer John Ridley, a personal hero and role model whom I had briefly met at San Diego Comic-Con, North America’s largest comic-book convention, in 2006.⁹ This encounter burned itself into my memory, shaking the liberal economic perspective that I had inherited from my father’s family, hardcore Democrats and union supporters who had helped the Party ascend in the political landscape of postwar Hawai’i. The context of our momentary fan-to-writer exchange has informed me to this day on the cultural politics of diverse ranks of creative workers that labor at fantastic storytelling for commercial mass media: first a panel, then a book-signing line, for authors of popular novels in the urban fantasy genre (which together with horror constitutes my chief fantastic modes of narrative practice). In that historical juncture—years before Ridley would win his Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay (2013’s *12 Years a Slave*), or garner critics’ acclaim for creating and showrunning unwaveringly intersectional social-justice dramas about race, gender, nationality, sexuality, and class during our current Peak TV era (the best of which were the respected but low-rated *American Crime* [2015-2017] and British Black Panther historical thriller *Guerilla* [2017-present])¹⁰—Ridley was already the most outstanding transmedia writer there. He had not just written and produced TV shows (for instance, UPN Network’s *Platinum*, in 2003), but also sold film adaptations of Ridley’s genre stories by writing-directing auteur Oliver Stone (the neo-noir *U-Turn*, 1997, co-written by Ridley, based on his novel *Stray Dogs*) and by future multiple-Oscar-Best-Director-nominee David O. Russell (the heist comedy *Three Kings*, 1999, which Russell rewrote from Ridley’s original screenplay, earning the latter “screen story” credit). However, even with that resumé, Ridley was ignored by SDCC fans of nerd-geek persuasion because, as the lone person of color on that panel, his novels’ content appeared markedly different from what the attendees sought. Based on its selection of the other panelists, Comic-Con’s definition of “urban fantasy” seemed to range from mannerpunk (aka the “fantasy of manners”: white European female characters navigating Georgian or Edwardian society’s gendered conventions,

wielding swordplay and wit, usually without the narrative boost of clearly supernatural foes) to paranormal romance (white US female characters juggling suburban or city life while courted by sexy vampires, ghosts, werewolves, fae, etc., who compete over the heroines' affections) to alternate-history Eurofantasy narratives (mostly white characters in a fantastical pre- or early-modern England engaged in thrilling acts of warfare, sexpionage, spellcraft, and dragon training). Disappointed that this whitewashed "urban" panel did not deliver on what I had thought would be a far more inclusive class, race, and regional resonance reflecting the world's diverse cities, I was thrilled that at least Ridley had turned up to offer his creative wisdom. A fan of the African American satirical spy flick *Undercover Brother* co-scripted by Ridley (2002, directed by mainstream black movie director Malcolm D. Lee, based on Ridley's animated web series) and intrigued by Ridley's recent novel duo featuring a mixed-race LatinX female LAPD officer battling comic-book-like mutants¹¹—which stood out as the only truly urban fantasy among those written by these speakers—I broke a personal rule against approaching famous writers to be the only autograph-seeker lined up to meet him. As I offered standard, no doubt forgettable, platitudes of fannish praise, I secretly marveled at how difficult it was, this business of authoring diversity. Ridley's quietly insistent presence—sitting alone on that panel, unseen and undervalued in that autograph line despite a track record of deftly crossing from web animation to novels to teleplays to movie screenplays, while daring to redefine this conventionally escapist, playful fantasy subgenre through community-oriented narrative modes that addressed racism, classism, poverty—impacted me like a meteor carving out a crater. This tricky business of writing mass-medial genre from a non-hegemonic, minority perspective necessitates entering into multidimensional struggles—mirroring cultural studies theorist Douglas Kellner's division of contemporary media scholarship into analyses of (1) the political economy of cultural production, (2) formal and thematic content of the text itself, and (3) audience reception and response (7-18)—interconnected creative fights that, as a hopeful scriptwriter and producer, I reconceptualize into three business stages: (1) setting up shop, (2) storytelling, and (3) evaluation. People of color, female, LGBTQ, and other diverse industrial writers must navigate these overlapping processes simultaneously in order to survive in a severely uneven playing field. Back then, I grasped that as a man of color employed within the tremendously racialized, classed, and gendered commercial-writing market—what Frankfurt-school media theorist in the field of creative industries David Hasmondhalgh calls

today's "networked" nature of much cultural work...moving back and forth between independent production and corporate cultures" (261)—Ridley had learned to jump from medium to medium, as he honed his (1) workplace ownership or control capabilities tailored to a writer's particular occupational role/s within the specific production relations of diverse information and communication technology (ICT) platforms (web, print fiction, TV, movies); (2) aesthetic mastery over these written-genre forms including the narrative skills for adding sociopolitical content in ways that cleave to each ICT's salient artistic conventions; (3) writerly influence over audience reception and interpretation (such as the requisite chit-chatty interaction with his then-miniscule, but highly discriminating, fanbase—me). In this complex set of processes, the artfully performed reproduction of counter-hegemonic cultural information in generically comforting ways can create distinguishing sigils of value-added "quality," which brand both the narrative product and the author him- or herself as worthy of greater exchange value in the television market. At the same time, if the story content is deemed politically "too soon" for audience acceptance, or seems not an aesthetic fit with existing genre conventions, the cost for writers attempting to distribute subversive ideas over this highly collaborative, commercially constrained media becomes apparent immediately. Sponsors withdraw, ratings fall, series face what statistical prediction website *TV By the Numbers* has nicknamed the "cancel(lation) bear," as their networks poise to chop the season's lowest-rated shows so that each such series tries to "outrun" its colleagues airing on the same network. Media studies scholars of culture-industry production such as Kellner and Hasmondhalgh have urged for two decades that cultural studies methodologies for researching mass media texts include the three stages of production, textual analyses, and reception, avoiding either purely textual analyses or just production-centered approaches. This remains triply so for screenwriters of any marginalized background. Because of the complexity of such tripartite analyses, the tale of what trade journals call "diversity writers" laboring within collaborative industrial storytelling, as I noted to myself even back then (crude as my grasp of the issues had been), is not an obvious one.

Two years later, when Finke and the WGA leadership contemptuously called out Ridley and a handful of his fellow fi-core scripters as scabs,¹² I noticed that the majority of these "scabs" were writers of daytime soaps, a conspicuously gendered target, being a rare TV genre frequently scribed by women.¹³ They also denounced the black screenwriter as the highest-profile scripter to cross the picket line. For a few months before the strike, in August

2007, Ridley's name had sparked in headlines of industry news sites when George Lucas signed him onto Lucas' longtime passion project, the CG-heavy historical action movie about the famous (black) Tuskegee airmen, *Red Tails*. As an educator in the field of social inequality, as well an incipient genre theorist, I could not help but be struck by the noticeable racial and gender stratification within the strikers' ranks, as well as wonder how genre related to these structural hierarchies of creative labor. When women author genre scripts, whether soaps or actioners or science fiction, they do so on severely uneven ground. Daytime drama scripters constituted almost half the "shamed" 28 writers who had gone fi-core, compared to their general labor participation as only a quarter of the WGA's overall roster.¹⁵ People of color comprised a mere eight percent of the Writers Guild membership. Such groups can be heavily penalized when they do not cleave to the white-male conventions, whether of narrative form, or of sociocultural workplace camaraderie.

In general, researching the collective experience of Hollywood audio-visual writing—the creative labor of the complex mass-media narrative practice known as scripting—demands political-economic mapping that avoids easy reliance on stock leftist organizational roles such as loyal union members versus scabs or diligent workers versus exploitative managers. In a profession and industry so persistently dominated by white, upper-middle-class to wealthy, and until relatively recently, straight men who are born-and-raised US citizens, various categories of minority screenwriters—which, during this project's inception, I had originally defined by race, gender, sexual orientation, class, nationality, religion, age, ability, and other intersectional factors that mark the writers' membership in social groups relatively lacking in institutional, socio-economic, or sociocultural power—juggle career needs for peer acceptance and artistic or commercial success with daily microfights to maintain professional credibility and creative authority against discrimination, as well as with major workplace conflicts directly related to textual representational issues that overlap with, evolve from, and impinge upon community battles for social justice. Specifically for genre studies, making sense of the economic struggles of different groups of minority screenwriters, in their strategic artistic deployment of genre modes towards constructing meaningful scripted stories, all the while utilizing this effort toward economic survival within a labor market slanted against them, calls for a critical engagement with global capitalism, assessed attentively on its own terms and operating within its own discursive system, to evaluate the contributions of these writers to the mass media landscape. As these scripters,

like Ridley, weave—or as Hasmondhalgh puts it, “network”—not just between various ICTs’ production relations, but interstitially, simultaneously, through both capital and community, minority scripters must perform a combination of business, artistic, and activist labor in order to exercise the screenwriter’s relatively broad latitude of workplace autonomy compared with other industrial jobs in mass media. My approach neither precludes nor excludes traditional analyses of collective organizational forms, including protest, labor movements, and public criticisms of hegemony such as op-ed pieces, news interviews, word-of-mouth distribution of community wisdom, etc. But it provides a deep and specific set of data about valuable economic tools for sociopolitical change within capitalistic venues, in an age where more and more of humanity becomes characterized by a biopolitical subjectivity in which little or no “outside” of capital’s global empire exists.

Because of the directive of production studies to understand mass-media art within the internal market dynamics and formal logics of industrial capitalism, in order to envision television’s three stages, from setting up shop to storytelling to evaluation, I put myself through a profound, if not unfamiliar, ontological shift. Setting aside the liberal worldview of my paternal lineage—the labor lawyers, New Deal Democrats and McCarthy-era (accused) “communists” and secular-humanist progressives, public-sector workers within the superstructure—I re-loaded my mental machinery with the complicated and difficult legacy of my maternal heritage—the union-busters and business managers, Republicans and (Japanese) religious-right fascists and libertarians, and entrepreneurs within the substructure. Familial wisdom fed this monograph’s orientation; growing up as a child who spent summers in Pauoa Valley, awakening to the sound of coins being sorted as my grandfather counted the change from the day before, to the smell of wrinkled green bills fresh from our Hotel Street/Ala Moana Park/Waikīkī bandstand/Mānoa plate-lunch empire, dank and thick with the oils of hundreds of ravenous fingers, I was raised in merchantdom. Our family’s is a mercantile perspective, one that sniffs out, strategizes, and frequently creates personal economic opportunities within capitalistic institutional structures, a deeply ingrained viewpoint that I am (I hope) placing into challenging conversations with Marxist and humanist epistemological frameworks. Though its political and ethical valences skew oppositely from those of sociology, my original methodological background, a mercantile imagination is necessarily, fundamentally, irrevocably, a social-scientific one. As my mother’s brother, entrepreneurial patriarch of our *ie* (Japanese patrilineal house or family hereditary

line), once advised me, “We are merchants, and we were always *political*.” My awareness of the links between money and power derives equally from three to four generations of Japanese American small business within our dual *ie*—including myself, a former manager within the audiovisual participatory tourism subsector of the global transmedia fantasy industry, and a one-time cultural worker within mass media as a business reporter, features writer, and translator—as well as from four to six generations of diverse Asian American settler-colonial economic history within the United States in general. More than other major pan-ethnic communities in the US, Asian Americans have historically relied upon business practices within global capitalism as *the* central part of their social identity and primary mechanism towards political agency, due to the peculiarly racialized ways that they had been excluded economically and legally from the US labor market and the parallel ways that they had been slotted symbolically by mainstream American-citizenship discourse as eternal foreigners, a popular-cultural status within which they (often problematically) negotiated a modicum of cultural and class authority as middle (or “model” aka “the good”) minorities.¹⁶ Because of this familial and community standpoint, my analyses of minority screenwriters offer intimate strategic insights about the ways that capitalism viewed factually, closely, from the inside, often unintentionally surrenders pecuniary ground or political potentiality to diverse forces of resistance, equitability, social justice, and allows the occasional small but noteworthy semiotic, even structural, transformation. It is my hope that grounding this qualitative analyses of TV writer and producer life stories, television textual content, and other data within my occasional life narrative, I can cut against the seemingly “objective” hegemony of social-scientific methods.

In its systematic chaos of greed, in its contradictory hegemonic desires for low labor costs on the one hand, and rising consumption among workers towards ever-expanding profit accumulation on the other, capitalism, even at its most “structural,” is neither monolithic nor rational. The internal competition between corporate conglomerates and industrial sectors, the wasteful and inefficient ways that major firms manage resources, the intricate yet randomly allied network of companies and financial organizations and markets, provide regular slips, openings, shifts, even historical ruptures, that allow workers from what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri call “the multitude” multiple opportunities to take advantage of these errors, agentially, within that mode of production itself. Here, I want to make it clear that I am not advocating for diversity in scripting as a workplace process,

diversity in the teleplay as an art form, and diversity in screenwriters as creative labor, with the short-term goals of amassing profit and building corporate empire, but rather, to extend counter-hegemonic efforts in these historically specific industrial practices towards future community and culture.

My maternal family's "we are merchants...always political" mindset, our personal entrepreneurial worldview, thus instructed me to concentrate on the subtext of Ridley's public pieces about the organizational politics of the WGA's collective action, as well as warily scrutinize other screenwriters' remarks ridiculing his fi-core choice. For example, in *The Huffington Post*, teleplay and film writer Michael Seitzman excoriated Ridley's (then rumored) decision to leave the picket line and return to his job:

(T)he only thing you're doing by going back to work is hurting those you call your friends and colleagues, weakening the very definition of collective bargaining by demonstrating disunity—not dissent, disunity. ("What 'Fi-Core' Really Means")

Reading this public accusation of disuniting the rank and file, I thought back to Ridley's far-sighted analyses a month earlier, five weeks into the strike, prior to his official fi-core decision. He had envisioned that the action would ultimately cost WGA members substantial work-hours and lost incomes, while not proving worth the relatively small gains the union might eventually "win" ("Why the Writers' Strike Was Doomed"). This turned out to be an accurate prediction of the strike's financial harm to its most vulnerable class of members, the working writer. According to a 2017 *Deadline* story, the WGA action's opportunity cost for members collectively ranged anywhere from \$71 million, which that industry news blog calculated as the scripters' total lost compensation during the strike's first calendar year of 2007, to a high estimate of \$287 million on which writers allegedly missed out during the action's 100 days, according to the AMPTP's somewhat self-serving calculation (Robb, "Studios and WGA Can't Even Agree"). Trusting that the WGA leadership would fight for their demands, 189 members had taken out \$2.86 million in loans from their guild, \$1.86 million of which still remain unpaid, almost a decade after the strike's conclusion (Robb, "WGA Members Still Paying"). Even as these members put their faith into Verrone and other WGA officers, and just as Ridley had publicly forecast while still a regular (not fi-core) Guild member, the three major demands made by the WGA—a greater cut of DVD royalties, WGA jurisdiction over reality-TV and animation scripters represented by other unions (such as the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Moving

Picture Technicians, Artists and Allied Crafts of the United States, or IATSE—a more blue-collar group), and high residual rates for digital/streaming “sell-through” (aka the “new media” demand)—were ultimately dropped by this leadership, either during informal talks with studio heads (as was the case with the reality/animation writer demand)¹⁷ or prior to the formal labor negotiations (in the case with the DVD residual demand);¹⁸ or the demands were met minimally after the Directors Guild of America (DGA), a comparably conservative labor union for TV and film directors known for its pro-management inclinations, struck its own, very weak contract with the AMPTP in the midst of the WGA strike, setting the bar low such that the “progressive” WGA ended up taking the same, very miniscule, new-media residual rates as the DGA (Sayre and King 238-42). The Guild’s concessions were exactly what Ridley had anticipated in his WGA strike, week five, op-ed piece, step by step.

Following Seitzman’s very public accusation of betrayal, Ridley posted an equally bold confirmation of his fi-core status after 15 years in the Guild. In this proclamation, he outlined his own history of betrayed trust, as a WGA member, by Guild leadership: his disappointment in its persistent lack of attention to diversity issues despite Ridley’s previous attempts to call attention to them within and without the union; his alarm over the leaders’ passive-aggressive silencing of alternative or critical voices among Guild membership; and his disgust at those leaders’ failure to protect his right to dissent at a recent WGA meeting during which he was subject to an atmosphere of hateful pillorying by fellow writers (as unofficial rumors of his fi-core status had spread); and, most saliently to my analyses, during the start of strike talks,

...I’ve had concerns about the guild’s approach to this work action: the lack of an individual with experience in Hollywood deal-making to lead negotiations; bargaining chips moved on and off the table in the haphazard manner of a first-time gambler at a roulette wheel; interim agreements arbitrarily granted, without the necessary vote by membership. (“John Ridley Goes Fi-Core”)

Ten years after Ridley’s controversial response, it strikes me how the transmedia wunderkind, whose “fan service” (audience reception) labor I had experienced first-hand at Comic-Con, had been actually chastising his white writer colleagues for engaging in economic struggle wrongly—*imagining* their occupational and political role within the labor relations of television and film ICTs wrongly. Well before his fi-core kiss-off, Ridley’s earlier op-ed critique of WGA leaders included a modest counter-proposal, if you will, to the

Guild's latest negotiating tactic that had resulted in the AMPTP breaking off talks. His proposal conceptualized a way to "set up shop" differently than the standard labor relations of the WGA-AMPTP status quo. He advised charging Guild membership an additional 1% in dues to transform the trade union into a collective or cooperative producing organization, which could fund, develop, and make the group's film projects, as well as enter into "authorship sharing" agreements with other organizations (such as distributors) as the WGA would own the resultant TV shows or movies. This proposal aimed to allow the screenwriter rank-and-file to marshal the power of the Guild's membership pro-actively. They could enter, empowered, into deals both with the studios—who according to Ridley would pay well to compete for their quality product, scripts created by talented writers—and with other working artisans in the film business, with which Ridley said the Guild would "work out some kind of profit participation...because — unlike the multi-nationals and conglomerates — we would be beneficent with our wealth" ("Why the Writers Strike Was Doomed"). In retrospect, it turned out that Ridley's plan effectively took what the WGA leadership had been doing behind members' backs (the "interim agreements arbitrarily granted, without the necessary vote by membership"), then aimed to redistribute that decision-making power in the hands of those members, by making them co-owners of the future TV and film products, rather than mere workers passively accepting whatever their leaders decided. In ensuing months after Ridley's proposal and fi-core statement, industry press revealed that the WGA leadership effectively enacted the same thing, only more individually. It had negotiated separate deals with individual studios and corporate mass-media producers such as David Letterman's "Worldwide Pants" production company (the "interim agreements" Ridley revealed cryptically to the public months ago), under an alleged "divide and conquer" tactic that many labor analysts as well as members found confusing, inconsistent, and fragmenting of the WGA's larger political strategy against the AMPTP (Rose). While some of these deals seemed to have been cut by the leadership to help specific TV and film producers (especially of late night and comedy talk shows) who expressed public empathy with the strikers, the interim agreements did not change the WGA members' core structural relationship with the studios as creative laborers, essentially placing the superior institutional bargaining power back in the hands of management. Ridley's proposal appears to me pro-active and co-optive of this (effectively) pro-AMPTP strategy of the Guild leaders. His plan, in essence, demanded that the leadership and elites of the WGA let working members

participate in their economic futures led by centralizing the value of their creative labor within the decision-making process, reconfiguring the entire business landscape through letting them own or co-own, rather than only receive residuals for, the products of stories that they themselves wrote. “I own my shit,” Ridley memorably wrote to fellow scribes when explaining the proposal, noting that the reason he had labored also in ICT platforms such as print fiction, independent graphic novels, webcomics, and other media was that intellectual property rights of writers and creators in those platforms were relatively secure compared to those for writers in the TV and film ICTs. Asserting that “There is no substitute for ownership,” he posed to WGA membership the issue of whether they wanted to continue to be “sharecroppers on the media plantation,” ending his critical op-ed with the political challenge, “Ownership, or servitude? Which will it be?” (“Why the Writers Strike Was Doomed”). In sharing this information, Ridley was letting the rank-and-file membership in on insider information that the other, “pro-strike” writer-producers had de-emphasized to their benefit.¹⁹

White-male sci-fi and fantasy showrunners such as Whedon, Lindelof, and MacFarlane were lending symbolic support to their writer employees—a move that raised their popularity among fans and burnished their media profiles, eventually helping to facilitate the elevation of their careers from cherished writer-producers of TV into high-paid film writers and directors—all the while individually (not collectively) negotiating their own powerful control and ownership over various television series which they had created or co-created, control achieved in part through their membership within the AMPTP where they networked with other producers and studio heads. By contrast, Ridley took that unpopular stance to support working screenwriters, who typically made substantially less than that of a showrunner, a position that commonly starts in the six figures per season but typically runs at that much per episode, amounting into millions of dollars per season. This high mark sits levels atop the income of the working screenwriter, whose regular jobs might come in few and far between, and who might be paid at minimum industrial levels set by the Guild and the AMPTP during such talks. As data samples indicating how low these income levels might descend, of the scripters who had borrowed from the Guild and whose loans were still outstanding in the *Deadline* report 10 years after the strike, “One writer still owed more than \$30,000; six others owed more than \$20,000; seven owed more than \$10,000; and 10 others owed more than \$5,000”; the average amount still outstanding from the 45 writer debtors is

\$8,730, not counting six small loans which totaled under \$10,000 and which the Guild wrote off as uncollectible (“WGA Members Still Paying”). These loan numbers, from hundreds of dollars through the low five figures, ridiculously small amounts for “successful” scripters such as A-list film writers or TV showrunners, to me indicate a range of US working-class through middle-class incomes for these poorest of writers, running from just above the poverty level in the mid-\$20,000 range, capping at the mid-to-high five figures.²⁰ That range suggests that most if not all WGA debtors earned only the Guild’s Minimum Basic Agreement (MBA) payments per script—an MBA which, as a higher-level scripter, Ridley said he did not rely upon for his earnings, and the pro-strike showrunners including WGA-W President Perrone definitely did not need to utilize, either. With the highest-profile writer-producer proponents of the union not possessing a vested interest in advancing working scripters’ needs in the first major Hollywood strike to occur in the financially expansive digital era of mass media, Ridley’s was a daring, innovative organizational plan that could have benefited working- and middle-class screenwriters if the upper-middle-class and upper-class writers in the union had been willing to take the risk. That is: if the 90% white majority of the Guild, in all its power and authority over the Hollywood writer’s market, had agreed to consider it. In the end, both the WGA’s more stable membership and its leadership simply lacked the imagination.

Genre juggler Ridley had ended the proposal with an unattributed, wry paraphrase of the showy oratorical opening spoken by the patriarch Jor-El (Marlon Brando), Kryptonian father of Kal-El (aka Clark Kent: Christopher Reeve), in the alien-superhero movie *Superman* (1978): “This is no fantasy, no act of a wild imagination,”²¹ before pointing out that many indie film auteurs managed to achieve such a vision by regularly creating great audiovisual work on small-scale budgets (“Why the Writers Strike Was Doomed”). In doing so, Ridley referenced fantasy as conceptualized by sociological speculative-fiction scholars such as Rosemary Jackson and Jack Zipes, who assert that exercising a fantastic imagination aids people to think outside the box of current socio-institutional structures, to envision something that seems impossible within the status quo, but that contains richness of alternative possibility and reality, should collective human force be applied in that direction.²² But Ridley’s proposal was lost upon an audience of creative workers unable to envision an organizational structure that they regarded as mere “wild imagination,” an audience that clung to hierarchy, not networked cooperation. Guild members, in trusting the highly visible,

star showrunners' who were structurally part of the enemy (i.e. TV/film producers), to lead both their symbolic and legal-bureaucratic fights against the AMPTP, suffered from a failure to fantasize politically. Guild leaders, given the authority to speak on behalf of the rank-and-file but not seriously considering an alternative collectivity to that which benefited only themselves and the elites within their union, suffered from a failure to fantasize economically. John Ridley, the rare man of color to have performed both showrunning and film scripting in that era—the secret disciple of both Francis Ford Coppola and his mentee George Lucas, whose careers had earlier tested how one can “own your shit” and wrestle artistic control from mass-media corporations—packed up his fantastical imagination and personal dignity, and went on his way, transforming his unneeded WGA status to fi-core on the way out.

“Storytelling”: How An Indigenous Televisual Artist Contributed To Fantastic “Scripting”/”Screen Writing” Amidst The NICL

The second set of events that made me reconsider the quality of twentieth-century Hollywood trade-union solidarity occurred in the wake of the WGA strike, albeit with considerably less headline-grabbing publicity in media-industry trades and mainstream journalistic venues, drawing comparatively little to no support of famous science fiction and fantasy film directors, TV showrunners, and screenwriters. Five years after the Writers Guild action ended, 500 visual effects artists, representing the unacknowledged “laborers of the spectacular” behind Hollywood’s ultra-profitable, science fiction / fantasy/ horror / fairy tale / superhero blockbuster films, organized protests outside the 2013 Academy Awards ceremony, to mourn the symbolic historical moment that Rhythm & Hues, the Oscar-nominated VFX firm, had just filed for bankruptcy, at the same time that film auteur Ang Lee’s prestige picture *The Life of Pi* would win the Taiwanese director his second Oscar for directing, an achievement that would have been impossible without that groundbreaking CG effects company (Pulver). *Pi*’s stunning fantasy effects, including a multidimensional shimmering ocean and a believably animated tiger, represented Rhythm and Hues’ crowning achievement, also winning a Best Visual Effects Award, but Lee notoriously failed to mention the VFX firm’s contributions during his acceptance speech as Best Director. To add insult to injury, during their time on the Academy Awards stage to receive their visual effects Oscar, when the Rhythm and Hues team attempted to express its deeply ambivalent emotions over being both bankrupt and bestowed, they were “played off” with the

orchestra's theme from *Jaws* (Fera), a stage-management technique disproportionately directed at below-the-line "tech" crew Oscar winners, such as editors, cinematographers, and costumers, whose acknowledgements run over the allotted time compared to above-the-line "artists" such as film directors, TV and film stars, and notable screenwriters. This broadcast moment seemed representative of how VFX artists in the Hollywood fantasy factory are superficially but anonymously recognized for their "innovations" to blockbuster cinema, while remaining politically screwed. The non-union status of most VFX workers was one of many topics addressed by the protesters, and despite recent organizing efforts by International Alliance for Theatrical and Stage Workers union (IATSE) and by the Visual Effects Society (VES), an honorary-membership group for VFX craft recognition and preservation, this has changed very little over the half-decade since. Today, effects artists continue to mobilize collectively against Hollywood studios and TV networks through seeking union status, a privilege mass-media corporations work to keep out of their hands. Unlike the WGA strike, where showrunners, performers, and crew who had been allowed entry into their respective unions notably lent their public support, this protest remained largely by and for effects artists and their families. Unionized Hollywood—what WGA strikers had earlier called "United Hollywood" in that union's striketime blog—especially fantasy and science fiction showrunners and cinematic directors, demonstrated no public desire to join in.

Despite their non-recognition by above-the-line writing, directing, and star-performer "superiors" in the commercial fantasy industry, below-the-line TV and film visual effects artists do not merely provide rote, mechanical, technical labor. Their professional knowledge, skillsets, and decisions apply artfully to televisual and cinematic *mise-en-scene*, enriching the story quality through aiding these audio-visual texts' absorptive narrative. Bill Westenhofer, who led the *Pi* visual effects team to its Academy Award, gave his "real" Oscar speech backstage moments after he was unceremoniously ushered off the televised stage:

At a time when visual effects movies are dominating the box office...visual effects companies are struggling. And I wanted to point out that we aren't technicians. Visual effects is not just a commodity that's being done by people pushing buttons. We're artists, and if we don't find a way to fix the business model, we start to lose the artistry. If anything, *Life of Pi* shows that we're artists and not just technicians. (Desowitz)

In this age, digital cinematography combines traditional camerawork, actors' real bodies, and physical locations and sets with computer-generated effects through specialized software for animation and for CG editing. Visual effects thus prove key to a fantastic audio-visual text's world-building to immerse the viewer into these narratives and interpellate them as fantasy subjects. According to critical fantasy scholar Mark Bould, who expanded upon this connection between fantasy and subjectivity in his essay in *Historical Materialism*, "The Dreadful Credibility of Absurd Things: A Tendency in Fantasy Theory," world-building plays a sharply different role in fantastic storytelling compared to its function within mimetic narrative traditions, as world-building nudges fantasy subjects into a kind of productive paranoia, as they attend to the very constructed details of this genre's diegesis. All fictional worlds require fantasizing; however, fantasy genres specifically are "not only not true to the extratextual worlds but, ... do not seek out or pretend to be. ... This concern with world-building, with the paranoid construction of textual ontologies, is consistently foregrounded in fantasy and the fantastic genres" (81). From this paranoiac hyper-awareness of world-building and of the constructed nature of the accompanying worldview comes greater discursivity, a potential within these genres for extra- and intra-textual self-reflection. Bould concludes that the foregrounding of world-building in fantasy creates a "frankly self-referential consciousness...of the impossibility of 'real life'...It is...the very *fantasy of fantasy* as a mode that...gives it space for a hard-headed critical consciousness of capitalist subjectivity"(84). Especially with the case of audio-visual fantasy, science fiction, and other speculative forms, in which world-building is richly aided by digital, computer-generated effects in addition to "practical" formal elements like make-up, set and costume design, the blocking and staging of performers/physical objects within scenes, and lighting schemes, the source of the fantastic narratives' power seems only partially lodged within written stories, dialog, and plot, aspects created by screenwriters.

Just as many in the WGA leadership, including multiple showrunners whose actions seemed to reflect their producers' agenda, made union decisions against the interests of the working scriptwriters, the lack of traction by digital effects workers to coalesce into a single, powerful, VFX union reflects the interests of large media corporations to limit both control and ownership of intellectual property (and its resultant benefits) within the hands of these firms and a small, complicit elite of famous movie directors, TV producers, and scriptwriters. Scott Squires, a seasoned VFX artist who possesses institutional memory

within his occupational field, having worked both in traditional (e.g. *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*) and digital (*Transformers: Dark of the Moon*) movie effects, notes that until the CG or digital era, the labor employed to create Hollywood's audio-visual tricks—the practical kind captured on camera, the "sleight of hand" cuts performed in the editing room, etc.—had been unionized ("Visual Effects Union, Take 2"). Noting that digital effects constitute the entertainment-industry's new storytelling norm, IATSE's "Union for VFX" advocacy page advances the criticism that most effects artists must work with or on textual materials which were originally crafted with the understanding that fair labor conditions embraced *all* workers who would proceed to add value to them—though these VFX artists do not share in such equitable employment conditions. IATSE, perhaps the most well-known union trying to organize FX labor that "create(s)...the unreal and impossible from their imaginations with the use of ... computer software," notes that the contemporary entertainment-industry business model involves relying more and more upon the work of such exploited artists. IATSE International President Matthew D. Loeb spelled out the situation of highly skilled VFX workers as "untenable" due to their industry's "race-to-the-bottom conditions" which are "unacceptable": "These workers deserve better," he summarized ("IATSE Offers Assistance"). By "race-to-the-bottom conditions," Loeb referred generally to what every visual effect artist working for the Hollywood fantasy factory knows, the dirty little secret that the studios, networks, and other entertainment-industry companies frequently deploy the threat of possibly using overseas labor in developing Asian and other nations for cheap VFX, often in the process both exposing these small foreign contractors to the danger of bankruptcy (when they compete for lowest prices offered for their work, which they might even provide "on spec," i.e. without advance pay, in a hopeful action to procure the Hollywood firm's long-term business or simply win out in a bidding war), and holding domestic US small VFX contractors and workers hostage to terrible work conditions and low pay due to this international threat. Specifically, Loeb aimed his words at the Sony Pictures International's R-rated animated film, *Sausage Party* (2016), co-produced by Nitrogen Studios, which did not just fail to pay these workers overtime, but threatened them for anonymously posting information on this illegal act in *Cartoon Brew* (Robb), an industry news outlet known for its critical approach to the field of animation. Silent throughout this controversy, which spread subsequently to *The Washington Post* and *The Los Angeles Times*, Nitrogen's co-producing company Point Grey Pictures,

created and run by above-the-line artist Seth Rogen and his writing partner Evan Goldberg, soaked up the positive reviews and relatively strong box office, letting the movie's directors, who came from Nitrogen, take the hit.

Such willful silence by US science fiction and fantasy screenwriting auteurs indicates their complicity with, and self-serving denial about, what scholars of globalization call the new international division of cultural labor (or NICL, a subset of the new international division of labor or NIDL) of "Global Hollywood" (Miller 107-111). US-based, elite creative-industry workers in mass-media corporations (e.g. screenwriters, film directors, TV producers) sit atop global commodity chains of cultural production over an international labor force that performs highly skilled, yet relatively low-paid informational, intellectual, scientific-technological, or artistic work (in this case: CG effects, animation, production design). The WGA's paid-writer ranks—as of 2016, 1,693 in movies and 4,284 in television (Writers Guild of America, West, Inc. 2-3)—reflect the upper-middle level in that worldwide commodity chain, lower than studio/network owners and their executives, but by no means solely, or even most consequentially, "authoring" the fantastic television and other audio-visual texts I write about here.

As a screenwriter and "aca(demic)/fan" of fantastic genre who seeks employment in two sectors of the same global culture industry well-known for their precarity of work conditions—commercial TV/film and academia—I am laying out target career pathways, while simultaneously analyzing their political-economic stakes and landscape. What would it mean for me, as a writer, to "script" fantastic TV²⁴? When I think about "fantastic storytelling" in television and cinema, the myopic perspective of Ridley's US white-male colleagues in the WGA seems not only selfish and prejudicial, i.e. racist-classist-sexist in its systematic exclusion of women scripters and writers of color, but also theoretically impoverished. How do I recognize other significant forms of audio-visual story creation in the collaborative process of making television—or, as screenplay theorist Steven Maras queries, how do I acknowledge the larger industrial process of "scripting," which is not only the glamorized practice of (mostly white-male) screenwriting, not the "gospel of story" (174) boasting the perfect-script-with-perfect-story-structure formula that makes teleplay or film writers seem the sole force behind the deep architecture of Hollywood's audio-visual tale-telling? I start by defining scripting—which pays attention to the historical production practice of Hollywood and the global film industry towards supplementing or even replacing

parts of the written screenplay with “improvisation, notation, creation and interpretation, structure and production” (170)—as “practices of ‘writing’ understood very broadly, encompassing writing with bodies, with the camera, with light, and so on. Even when page-orientated the focus is on movement, rhythm, and physicality...” (171-172), Maras denaturalizes the individualistic Hollywood myth of the star writer, the screenwriter as auteur, placing the limited creative labor of this writer within the larger context of global production relations and alongside other screenwriting-interactive forms of audio-visual storytelling that truly create the whole narrative text that comprises a TV show or film. Maras’ notion of scripting distinguishes what we know as “screenwriting” (one word) from what he calls “screen writing” (two words) which does not limit storytelling labor to a page-based or manuscript-producing form (171), but rather, anything that tells the onscreen story. Screen writing envelops everything in the actual TV or film scripting process. It might encompass story development work involved in rehearsals and acting improvisation between the director and performers (this especially applies to comics and comedy); the larger techniques of directorial improvisation (when directors change story-related content during production or even after, in the editing room); and the values, norms, and beliefs of film and television funding organizations and film financing processes, which might shape, influence, or censor story content as the audio-visual text evolves. (172-73) The contributions of VFX and CG creative workers, of course, so skilled, specialized, and artistic, so necessary to the imaginative journey of science fiction and fantasy viewers through their detailed, powerful, visceral world-building, fall under the industrial practice of scripting or screen writing labor.

To embrace Maras’ broad, diverse, and equitable approach to screen writing, rather than screenwriting, in this last section, I will discuss three historical case studies of indigenous creative workers, situated globally within this worldwide commodity chain of fantastic TV, who significantly aided in the “scripting” of their science fiction shows, albeit from relatively middle to lower-middle levels of authority and creative autonomy within their corporate mass-medial workplaces. They are TV director Lee Tamahori, a Māori who worked in his ancestral Aotearoa (New Zealand) for the Hollywood series *The Ray Bradbury Theater* (TRBT), on which I will write most extensively; Uchinanchu (Okinawan) writer-producer Kinjō Tetsuo, employed in Tokyo for the Japanese live-action superhero *Ultra 7* series; and John Kneubuhl, the Samoan American writer of many First Golden Age TV series in the US, most notably the science-fiction slipstream show *The Wild, Wild West*.

Though I am not from indigenous origins, either regionally in Hawai‘i or ancestrally in Japan, I plan on producing and co-writing the science fiction and fantasy films of my husband, a second-generation indigenous Okinawan living in diaspora in Honolulu. As someone hoping to co-author community narratives, who has trained in the cinematic form, I cannot limit my imagination of screen writing to only that which I put down on the page. Authorship, for me, is always collaborative, institutional, and relational.

This dissertation’s primary research subject is Hollywood screenwriters working for the US TV industry during the Peak Television era as notable examples of global fantasy production by corporate mass media and of contested authorship by different occupational levels of creative labor. However, this chapter also illustrates the ways that scriptwriting for modern TV-related ICTs represents a continuity of community storytelling, the larger intermedial framework for the historical production of televisual story. The following is the only section of this project that addresses pre-digital-era television in order to emphasize the enduring primacy of community storytelling even across contemporary corporate ICTs of capital and empire, using the particular historical cases of a few indigenous, aboriginal, First Nations, and/or Native community members who have served as global creative labor for colonial TV at levels of relatively powerful authorial expression. I have selected TV texts significantly authored by three diasporic television auteurs whom I call indigenous, based generally on the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues’ definition of indigenous peoples. The UN fact sheet lists indigenous people/s as possessing these traits:

- Self-identification as indigenous peoples at the individual level and accepted by the community as their member
- Historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies
- Strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources
- Distinct social, economic or political systems
- Distinct language, culture and beliefs
- Form non-dominant groups of society
- Resolve to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities (United Nations)

Through applying this rubric, I excluded diasporic 1.5-generation Irish American writer John Logan, whose television writing and producing work in gothic horror series *Penny Dreadful* includes consistently decolonial themes (particularly in relation to the United Kingdom regarding his ancestral homeland of Ireland, but also in relation to Britain’s other colonial

subjects such as parts of Africa and India), from this chapter's analyses. A joint Sky (UK) and Showtime (US) production, *Penny* constitutes a partially North American-made text, so I thought it important to consider Logan's status with regard to the indigenous peoples of our country, especially in terms of Irish settlers occupying Native land in the US Midwest (e.g. Chicago), as such settlers have historically formed a dominant group in control of the major institutional mechanisms of US imperial conquest, including public safety and elected political structures (police, mayors, Democratic Party leadership, etc.). I included Okinawan writer Kinjō and Samoan writer Kneubuhl because both had journeyed into the mass-media industries of their ancestral homelands' specific colonizers, Japan and the US respectively. However, my discussion of Māori director Tamahori came as the result of my assessing the complex ways in which colonizers' economic structures of empire interweave with those of each other. The historical development of the New Zealand settler state's film and TV industry occurred both parallel to, and in interaction with, the industrial structures of Hollywood media firms, especially after the latter relied more and more on increasingly institutionalized global value chains of television production from the 1980s onward.

The position of indigenous screenwriters as well as indigenous (as per Maras' definition) "screen writers" illustrates fully the interdependent, predatory relationship between global Hollywood and the new international division of cultural labor, as well as the NICL's reinforcement of existing socioeconomic, colonial, and national hierarchies. Among WGA membership, based on the union's imperialist methodology which deploys the US-Census-based, settler-colonial framework of mostly mutually exclusive "ethnic" categories of hyphenated "Americans," rather than multiple, global, regional, and/or diasporic categories based on genealogies, tribes/nations/peoples, and/or ancestral homelands, Native Americans comprise the smallest group of non-white screenwriters in Hollywood, making up 0.1% of both TV and film writers employed in 2014 according to membership data of the WGA West (Hunt 45). By and large, Los Angeles and other global media cities—i.e. corporate-media dominated metropolises which often additionally serve as imperial centers of capital in the first world—are extremely hostile to, and exclusionary of, Native screenwriters (as an extension of their longer histories of symbolic genocide and representational imperialist racism). Even so-called indigenous-themed shows, such as *The Red Road* (Sundance, 2014-2016) set in the US; *Frontier* (Discovery and Netflix, 2016-present) and *The Terror* (AMC, 2018-present) set in Canada; and *Cleverman* (Australian Broadcasting

Station, 2016-present), set in Australia, do not actively recruit and train a high percentage of Native screenwriters who might then exercise some control over such series' overall cultural representation of their own communities. In terms of workplace authority and artistic autonomy, truly successful television writers from indigenous communities arise when their tribes, nations, groups, and cultural or media organizations arrange with their settler-colonial state to set up and fund exclusively indigenous media channels, streaming venues, or TV and film projects, usually supported in part by the public funding of the “democratic” settler empire, as an unacknowledged, informal step towards Native reparations or sovereignty, as well as an historical response to waves of indigenous activism, independence movements, and earlier community mediamaking. Witness, for instance, Aboriginal screenwriter Steven McGregor, currently earning accolades for co-writing Native Australian director Warwick Thornton's cinematic neo-Western courtroom thriller *Sweet Country* (2017), a scripter who trained in part on the Aboriginal-produced Australian series *Redfern Now* (ABC1, 2013-2015), which in turn emerged from a wave of Aboriginally owned and produced films in the early 2000s. These indigenous scripters tend to receive training in “traditional” (i.e. colonial-capitalist) screenwriting in settler-occupied regions wherein the media ecology includes a sizable nonprofit sector funded via public taxes and indigenous peoples deploy the energy of independence movements towards organizing to receive those filmmaking funds [such as Canada, where Inuk writer-director's stunning drama based on indigenous history and folklore, *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* (2001) is regarded as an epic “Canadian” film in addition to Native cinema].

Specifically in terms of indigenous mass-media fantasy, these texts generally consist of, first, animated folkloric videos—such as those depicting myths, legends, and ancient histories—which tend to be heavily narratively structured so as to preserve the oral elements of storytelling, rather than relying on the extensive dialog and overly elaborate plots or action typical of corporate fantastic narratives. These videos are positioned rhetorically by their frequent funding by such public/non-profit sources as educational curricula for children, rather than “commercial” storytelling for adults and general audiences. Second, indigenous mass-media fantasy utilizing live-action TV and film production efforts tend to draw heavily upon documentary genre modes, so as to preserve and historically record important spiritual knowledge for community survivance, including group events related to stewardship of the land and performance activities using specific cross-medial practices that perpetuate and

advance the culture. These patterns result in a substantial quantitative imbalance between these more important “children’s” and “documentary” genres versus “fluffier” scripted TV/film genres of (colonially shaped) fantasy. For instance, in Hawai‘i, the ‘Ōiwi TV channel’s website for indigenous Hawaiian filmmaking and media audiences includes many videos under its key categories of “culture,” “environment,” “education,” “music,” “language,” and “keiki” (children), but very few videos under the last category of “entertainment,” what Western colonial audiences would regard as “scripted” television or film (‘Ōiwi TV). “Fantasy” storytelling on this basic-cable community TV network seems to favor the animated folkloric videos and the staged then filmed live performances of traditional stories, but not works similar to Fijian director Toa Fraser’s feature film *The Dead Lands* (2014), a scripted attempt at premodern Māori storytelling using action-adventure genre modes or to Hawaiian director Ty Sanga’s short *Stones* (2009) which retells legend using dramatic pacing and in-the-moment psychological narrative beats similar to those in a Hollywood film. Perhaps the unreasonably expensive and logistically demanding dictates of movie and TV production, combined with the individualistic orientation of these industrial storytelling forms (as assumed to result from a director’s or writer’s vision, not from a community’s collective knowledge), combined with the destructive effects of capitalism and colonialism upon Native communities, makes it undesirable for indigenous mediamakers to participate in scripted mass media on a wide scale. Recent examples that test the waters via digital and streaming video include the scripted bilingual web series *Abikāroa* (2017) which Māori TV will stream and also develop into a companion show in which community people talk about the latest episodes of the serial drama.

Without this kind of empowered and encouraging workplace support born from larger historical trends of Native control over the means of production, how do indigenous screenwriters and screen writers navigate colonial, corporate mass-media fantasy storytelling within empire?

Providing Direction: “Screen Writer” Lee Tamahori Subverts His Work-for-Hire Occupational Limitations for *The Ray Bradbury Theater* Show

Early in his career, Maori filmmaking auteur Lee Tamahori served as one of several international directors to helm the television series *The Ray Bradbury Theater* (TRBT, 1985-1992), written and executive produced out of Los Angeles, then broadcast across the US by

cable market-leader HBO followed by USA Network, but performed, shot, and co-produced in Canada, England, and Tamahori's ancestral homeland Aotearoa or New Zealand. With the explosive growth of the cable market in the 1980s, *TRBT* and other US-headquartered television co-productions utilized the New International Division of Cultural Labor as a common budgeting tool to circumvent entertainment-industry unions, leverage lower wages and less regulated work conditions in foreign countries, and minimize production costs. However unequal these production relations, labor participation in such studio operations by TV and film crews in semi-peripheral countries like New Zealand allowed for regionally based, culturally diverse mediamakers to build artistic skillsets to qualify for higher-status positions within the worldwide media industry. As one of the few repeat directors of *TRBT*, shooting three shows towards the end of the series' 65-episode, six-year run, Tamahori used his directing labor to construct an appealing resumé as a genre storyteller, as well as perform some of Maras' non-written scripting aka "screen writing" work.

Bolstered by an impressive production portfolio within Maori-media communities and New Zealand cinema and broadcast projects, Tamahori was on his way to becoming the formidable indigenous filmmaker of searing family drama *Once Were Warriors* (1994) ("Lee Tamahori, Director [Ngāti Porou]"). But his time on the *TRBT* set helped Tamahori transform himself into an in-demand auteur of Hollywood-genre works, including noir/crime (1996, *Mulholland Falls*), thriller/drama (1997, *The Edge*), neo-noir thriller (2001, *Along Came a Spider*), spy action (2002, *Die Another Day*, in the James Bond franchise; 2005, *xXx: State of the Union*, in the multiracial "xXx" franchise), thriller/science-fiction action (2007, *Next*, an adaptation of Philip K. Dick's work), and thriller/biopic (2011, *The Devil's Double*).

This subsection uses Tamahori's directing work on *TRBT* to illustrate how the scripting of the complex televisual genre of horror reflects layers of team-based creative work within a complicated, if collaborative, production process. Through close readings of three episodes, I explore Tamahori's televisual horror decisions, as respectful intermediations of written horror narratives by screenwriter-producer Ray Bradbury.²⁵

TRBT's Peculiar Production Relations Test Auteurist Debates Over Director Versus Screenwriter. *The Ray Bradbury Theater's* unusual management structure unintentionally gifted its crew, especially directors such as Tamahori, with limited job autonomy to experiment with storytelling expression in ways relatively uncommon for a television shoot. Bradbury, by

the time of the show's production a seasoned Hollywood scriptwriter, benefited from employment contracts that effectively put him in charge of adapting his literary stories and plays into TV episodes, and that organized the show's production processes so that he, rather than an all-powerful showrunner, oversaw the onscreen results, via long-distance monitoring of working cuts of episodes.

Bradbury, working from his home in Los Angeles, through international faxes and phone calls to Tom Cotter, his on-set co-production ally in New Zealand and other shooting locations, managed the show so that the audiovisual artistry of any given episode primarily served to reproduce his original fictional tales with a strong degree of faithfulness in theme and emotional content, rather than evolving into a stylistic whole that conformed to a consistent "look" across the majority of episodes.²⁶ For the most part, the episodes bear little resemblance to each other in terms of general audiovisual approaches to *mise-en-scène*.²⁷ I think that this aesthetic unevenness came about partly because no staff writers existed within the official credits of *TRBT*. With Bradbury as the sole writer given onscreen credit for all produced episodes (noted in their screen credits as "Based on an original story and written by RAY BRADBURY"), there was no formal writers room which would normally provide the industrial labor of regularly employed teleplay authors who might have pitched and developed episodes as a team, their narrative skills normally trained and intertwined with those of fellow writers room staff by the supervising or executive producer so as to evolve stories collaboratively, blending them into the show's overall audiovisual language.²⁸

While sporting several executive producers, including Bradbury and his business partner, Larry Wilcox, who wielded very limited input into episode content, and their Canadian and New Zealand co-producing partners who oversaw the nuts-and-bolts financial and logistical minutiae of production, the series seemed to eschew an official showrunner. The showrunner, a conventional management position for TV series, integrates the narrative contributions of such lower-level producers and writing staff with the series' general visual design, coordinating episodes' audiovisual interpretation with a pool of directors who crossmedially translate the teleplays into filmed footage to achieve that consistent look, . Rather, Bradbury himself seemed to supervise the series' audiovisual design, through frequent communication on episode details, in the form of multiple teleplay drafts and feedback to filmed cuts, expressed to Cotter, originally one of several mid-level producers, who gradually evolved into the *de facto* showrunner, as he proved himself a loyal, behind-the-

scenes proxy for Bradbury. I suspect that, so long as the core plot and characters remained true to Bradbury's scripts and written guidance, and so long as the episodes came in on budget, this over-determined story-level and under-cohering production-level setup of management control allowed for TRBT directors a relative latitude of aesthetic choices on key visual elements such as camerawork, lighting, staging, production and art design, sound, editing, costume/hair/make-up, and performance—televisual variables which Tamahori skillfully orchestrates, towards articulating his own filmmaking style.²⁹

This individual experimentation in directorial expression was all the more necessary, because, unlike a conventional scripted show with a writers room, the basic teleplays themselves could not be collaboratively rewritten or otherwise altered by other scripters, supervising producers, directors, or executive producers without Bradbury's permission via Cotter. Bradbury tirelessly communicated his responses to working cuts of the episodes, relaying the latest suggestions to Cotter. Even the fiction stories that Bradbury and his producing partners selected to adapt, which proved hardest to transform into an audiovisual format, could not be changed in terms of core plot, characters, and overarching themes without his approval. In this workplace structure, as crew members with most autonomy over the other aspects of what film production scholar Bruce Block calls the “visual story,”³⁰ the episodes' directors often exerted their ingenuity, creativity, and limited control over production details outside of these “screenwritten” elements (plot, characters, dialog) to fill the narrative gaps. To borrow a phrase from fashion impresario Tim Gunn of reality TV hit *Project Runway*, the show's directors had to “make it work”—a survival technique within the time constrictions of commercial art production, forcing aesthetic details together in makeshift ways towards a conventional-yet-unpredictable presentation deemed effective enough for marketing, exhibition, and distribution. This “making episodes work” by TRBT directors aided Bradbury in enlivening his stories from the abstract, nuanced realm of literary expression, to the concrete, focused arena of televisual story. Though the results proved inconsistent in terms of creating an overall series style, I feel that TRBT's individual episodes displayed greater range in inventive visual storytelling techniques than similar genre series from the 1980s (e.g. *Tales from the Crypt*, the “new” *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, *Amazing Stories*).

To flesh out Tamahori's contributions to TRBT, longtime debates within film theory about cinematic authorship, especially over rival authority positions of director-as-auteur versus screenwriter-as-auteur, require brief revisitation. Within screenwriting studies, the

field known as “auteur theory,” a postwar discourse over the creation of film style within corporate studio contexts, is a touchy subject. The French New Wave journal editors, scholars, and directors, especially the artistic community around *Cahiers du Cinéma*, as well as leading Western newspaper critics revolved authorship discussion around the position of film director, identifying these helmers' “signature” styles which, by intention or vision, gathered together disparate cinematic elements into a markedly distinct look to serve consistent thematic motifs.³¹ Screenwriters, who from the start of the US movie history fought hard to receive both the artistic credit and related workplace authority to optimize their narrative contributions in the final audiovisual text, have always disputed the excessive attribution of cinematic authorship to directors.³² In the field of television particularly, where the career ladder from worker to management conventionally privileges scriptwriters rather than directors, who have historically been viewed as replaceable crew, not unique artistic talent, for production structures within that medium, such criticism of director-as-auteur is all the more persuasive. Showrunners, basically high-positioned writers who worked their way up the ranks to earn enough producing power to control the overall direction of a TV series, tend to be credited as televisual auteurs, rather than work-for-hire directors.³³ Detailed textual readings of Tamahori's *TRBT* episodes will demonstrate not only his directorial range and cultural contributions, vis-à-vis Bradbury's dominant position as sole scriptwriter and executive producer, but add historical nuance and precision to these auteurist debates.

Because Ray Bradbury wielded the workplace authority to correct drafts of the episodes' rough and final cuts—passing crew members these suggestions through Cotter on every aspect of *TRBT* from casting, music, and edits to, occasionally, sound and camerawork—identifying Tamahori's particular artistic contributions to the episodes becomes a methodological challenge. My snapshot perspective on the production relations behind the shooting and editing of these Tamahori-directed episodes is also limited to what I read from Bradbury's business correspondence with Cotter, as well as teleplay drafts and other production documents from the Center for Ray Bradbury Studies archives, and is by no means conclusive in terms of representing the content of all *TRBT*-related letters, drafts, and production documentation in that collection, nor a fixed map of the show's overall management structure, which altered as the TV seasons and shooting locations progressed with the co-production's evolution.

In approaching these three episodes themed around death, loneliness, and fear, I isolate technical artistic details that Tamahori used to rework Bradbury's mainstream-US notions of horror with global, decolonial accents. In these episodes, the Maori director transforms Bradburyian horror into an international blend of terror and humanism.

"The Long Rain": On-Location Greenery and Low-Fi Effects Animate a Planet's Hostility Towards Would-Be Colonizers

As with a handful of other *TRBT* shows, "The Long Rain" (season 6, episode 14) presents its director with the challenge of carving out televisual-horror modes within an episode-long conversation between multiple men who are essentially taking a walk, while not much else unfolds onscreen in terms of deep characterological or thematic plot advancement to escalate the action. Similar episodes include "The Town Where No One Got Off" (season 2, episode 1), where a protagonist and an antagonist walk through a mysterious town, with the latter first tracking the former surreptitiously, then the two confronting each other in argument, until the former escapes on a train; and "The Pedestrian" (1989), where two male colleagues leave their building at night for fresh air, conversing on how walks have become unusual in their futuristic society, before getting minutely interrogated by a helicopter drone, until one man departs in that empty vehicle. For the most part, these are "talking heads" stories, literary tales dominated by ruminative philosophical dialog, rather than by character or plot evolution. Their lack of televisual horror motifs—of an identifiable object of terror, from which fear, dread, and anxiety may stem—is concealed by the visual presentation of characters walking from one point to another, which tricks viewers into sensing a rise in the narrative stakes. To be fair, Bradbury, well-aware of his limitations as a scripter who had earned initial fame in print literature, did attempt teleplay-specific adjustments to his stories, upping the level of onscreen conflict and visual stakes for many episode scripts. For instance, by featuring two friends who could interact onscreen in his teleplay, Bradbury altered his original "Pedestrian" story which had offered only one male walker and much of the nostalgic content about human society of yore transpired within the tale's narration, not manifested performatively through auditory dialog and visible tension between two men. However, because of a general faithfulness to their literary versions, the teleplays' many non-cinematic aspects often forced *TRBT* directors to utilize televisual elements to heighten missing expressive plot points in order to present an internal story that could be watched

onscreen. Don McBready, for example, in directing “Town,” staged the protagonist walking through visually rich locations within the titular suburban neighborhood, locations colored with carpets of golden leaves animated by offscreen leafblowers, some next to rivers and canals where the water created supplementary motion, some interior and darkly lit so as to seem sinister, adding tonalities that made the protagonist’s walk and the antagonist’s philosophical argument with him during this extended (if little-changing) action appear more emotionally eventful than it had been in the teleplay.

When he filmed “The Long Rain,” Tamahori faced a similar, albeit more difficult, dilemma. Not only did this show feature a crew of Earth astronauts talking endlessly with each other about the foreign planet they were attempting to settle and the futility of their mission as they walk across its relentlessly wet surface. But during the exhausting trek that dominated most the episode's running time, several crew characters die in turn. The would-be colonizers surrender to the Venusian ecosystem’s never-ending rain, a frightening electrical storm—aka the “monster” antagonist—and their own despair, until the sole survivor, the desperate commander Trask, finds shelter in the human-constructed Sun Dome. While this plot might sound more conflict-centered and visually rich, as well as much less philosophical, than the other two episodes, without a concrete villain within the teleplay to materialize the planet’s hostility other than the rain and the storm, Tamahori was essentially limited to filming men talking and walking. His budget only allowed a handful of visual tricks through which to portray fantastic-genre iconographies of environmental horror: a few inserts of vines entwining human legs or feet; practical-effect explosions depicting the lightning’s deadly impact; scattered, crude, early-CG-era, digital images such as lightning bolts, a glowing tree lit by St. Elmo’s fire, as well as an electrified human body blazing from the bolts; and a matte painting of the Sun Dome in the distance, composited into a single, wide shot of the frighteningly dominant Venusian jungle. With these Hollywood-style effects being few and far between, Tamahori's task was to accumulate the men’s walk-and-talk, convincingly, into an intense, visual narrative about the crew's hysteria, madness, and death within a hostile ecosystem.

The narrative vulnerability that Tamahori encountered as the chief audiovisual storyteller for this directorial job was, first, that he lacked the authority to change the script's core plot in a direction that would "make it work" onscreen, and next, that he obviously lacked the budget to illustrate that "monster" as a terrifying, antagonistic, mile-high, shower-

laden storm with hundreds of blue limbs of electricity that would tragically strike some of Trask's crew members (Bradbury, *Illustrated*, 56), or to construct and shoot a convincingly Venusian rainforest of pale, bleached-looking foliage the color of Camembert cheese (ibid 55)—key worldbuilding details within the literary story to depict the extraterrestrial terrors of a human crew confronted by a murderous planet. This artistic challenge becomes apparent when contrasting that *TRBT* episode with the more expensively produced theatrical film, *The Illustrated Man* (1969), an anthology of Bradbury's works directed by Jack Smight, containing a cinematic depiction of the same short story, which was cut to roughly the same length. Studio film and TV director Smight used expensive Hollywood visual tricks to escalate a sense of fear among the characters and thus audience, such as the stunning, horrifying, practical effect of showing a rebellious crew member struck by the commander's laserlike weapon, then cutting to a shot of that dead crewman's body quickly swallowed up into the wet, muddy folds of the planet. Appearing as if granted a B-feature budget, Smight's rendition featured many medium, wide, and high-angle crane shots of the crew walking across the elaborately constructed Venusian set. He framed human bodies as a central focus: whole bodies traveling across the screen, in front of a landscape of pale, puffy, thin trees resembling bleached broccoli or cauliflower; or human heads and torsos splayed in front of boulder-like “cliffs” unnaturally square and flat on the surface, like monochromatic grey wallpaper; or the commander and one crewman's darkly lit forms facing off in a clearly fake cave set; or the astronauts' feet tromping through artificial water canals standing in for rivers. The film language calls to mind the SF shows and movies of the postwar era, characterized by well-decorated soundstages with phony alien greenery and monochromatically painted “hills” standing in for foreign planets. Such environments, however foreign-looking, feel abstractly alien, usually staged in the background, separate from Earth heroes' bodies. This movie's unique horror element departing from such cinematic traditions: Smight set the production's rain nozzle to large-sized drops, to flood actors' faces and bodies with Venusian showers, making their characters' misery concretely apparent.

Tamahori, by contrast, employs character staging—the positioning and movement of performer bodies, with respect to other onscreen elements and to the camera's anticipated journey—and his outdoor location's real greenery and rivers to animate the teleplay, creating low-budget effects via cinematography and editing. Rain, plants, rivers, and trees all belong to the same ecosystem to Tamahori, who narratively textures the trek by presenting each

natural element as an antagonistic force, creating fear among the men, especially when elements strike simultaneously. Tamahori, on a tight TV schedule which no doubt did not allow for many retakes, pours heavy “rain” upon his actors only when Commander Trask first gets introduced.³⁴ In this interior “spaceship” scene Tamahori’s deep-space (but not deep-focus) medium-wide shot positions that protagonist in the foreground facing the camera, salvaging a flashlight from his vessel’s wreckage, as a raggedy curtain of water falls onto the area immediately behind his body, its downpour emphasized by an overlapping column of “daylight” (presumably through cracks in the top part of the spacecraft). A hard-to-see crewman enters the ship from the back end of this deep space, his body concealed by the drizzly downpour which divides the two men. Trask turns around, his shoulders splattered by the waterfall, and tosses the flashlight through that sunlit shower towards the crewman, then steps through it to follow the man who has caught the flashlight before exiting the ship. This precisely choreographed encounter establishes the grueling preponderance of the planet’s rain as something that will come between the captain and his crew. Thus, in following sequences, Tamahori can utilize effects shortcuts, production “cheats” to remind the audience of the rain, without making water flood over performers’ bodies. As interludes throughout the episode, Tamahori sprinkles exterior shots of rain falling diagonally in the jungle. In these inserts, the camera’s Dutch tilt attracts immediate visual interest, as a similarly slanted ray of light (the “sun” beaming through treetops) intermingles with the shower to remind viewers of rain’s skewed omnipresence. In narrative scenes, Tamahori scatters “rain” across the camera’s foreground or across the background greenery without splattering the pre-wet performers themselves. He captures its texture on camera through the aforementioned veil-of-light tricks or through strategically placed, off-camera, smoke pots (when the characters move on land) or dry ice (when they move through water) that further dramatize the visible drizzle with “fog.” Like light—which Tamahori utilizes in bold flashes to brighten narrative scenes randomly, a cheaper way of illustrating lightning than the few CG bolts he spends mostly in one discrete sequence—rain as a cinematic element proffers non-chronological, and thus non-causal, texture. Like light, rain is not a dynamic narrative force that visually builds over time; it is notoriously difficult to animate into a televisual character with tangible momentum, direction, and impact to motivate onscreen events. In Smight’s version, whenever the heavy Venusian rain poured all over the crew, these scenes felt static, because the performers had to stand relatively still for

viewers to perceive the sheer volume of water falling upon their bodies. Tamahori deploys both light and rain as supplementary characters, players enacting the planet's cruelty towards its colonizers, as the men push forward on their trek.

Unlike Smight, who literalized the title of Bradbury's original print story, "Death-by-Rain" (in 1950's *Planet Stories*), Tamahori creates a TV language of interrelated elements within that environmental system furnishing onscreen conflict to depict the planet's integrated antagonism towards the crew. He stages the characters' bodies so that, as they trudge through every scene, it is the planet, not humans, that comes to occupy the frame. The crew wanders throughout the unwelcome land, sometimes emerging at the camera's forefront, but mostly shadowed by this devouring ecosystem. The episode's televisual language is set up from the beginning, after an introductory montage presents the Venusian setting: quick shots of dark, lightning-struck clouds, rainy rivers, and dense jungles. Tamahori's first significant camera move makes it unclear whether this planetary character will surrender narrative power to the Earth men. He opens on a closeup of foliage shot in front of a background of thick trees. Then, through a continuous panning movement, he shows the branch extend into a tree trunk, revealed as bearing human equipment atop it. The first human appears during this pan, as the camera crosses the barely discernible legs, then hands, of a man's lower body concealed within the greenery. The hands lift a piece of equipment from the trunk, as his form walks behind a curtain of darkly lit foliage in the foreground, obfuscating his torso. Hinting that trees and bushes, not humans, may focalize the camera's eye throughout Tamahori's story, the panning motion follows the man's shadowy form through this black cover of branch, trunk, and leaf, before the audience sees him join the rest of the crew standing in the background. Only at the sequence's end does the camera move past the thicket, to present an unspeckled, brightly lit, wide shot of the men talking in front of their ship.

Throughout the crew's long walk, this undeniable planetary presence, in multiple palettes of greenery, water, and mud splayed across the screen, persists, often, but not only, in the foreground. Filmed in tight medium and closeup shots as the men amble towards the camera, or angled from the right or left of their faces, as they bob past its lens, Tamahori's performers stomp through branches and bushes, which slap their heads and which their arms struggle to push aside, heightening the arguments and physical altercations between the astronauts. Tamahori often stages the jungle elements right in front of the camera, as well as

alongside its far edges, obscuring whole views of the human bodies which uncomfortably writhe through the flora and liquid. Over time, a sense of claustrophobia accumulates, minimizing the light tonality of Bradbury's goofy, SF-Golden-Age, gallows-humor dialog such as "The jungle handles the funeral service; no flowers, please!" as well as the dull, walk-and-talk exposition, within a visceral *mise-en-scène* of these humans' growing hysteria.

When one astronaut is felled by lightning near the end of the episode's first act, the relatively still, wide shot of his corpse lying in the foreground makes it look as if it will become naturally integrated into the planetary detritus, his body muddied, its outline faded into the brown-black undergrowth of dead foliage and bushes, with tall, shadowy trees framing the midground and background. His crewmates stand far in the back of the composition, undistinguished from the unending jungle. Tamahori's is a far more devastating death scene than the grotesque, exoticized one of the planet swallowing the fallen crewman in Smight's version, which feels distanced and artificial by comparison. The distinction is one of consciousness filtered through cinematographic and editing "suture" techniques that signal with whom the audience should identify. Smight encouraged viewers to take in the spectacle of his obviously foreign planet with conventional shot-reverse shot editing sequences of the body eaten up by the foamy Venusian ground, then the hideous image responded to by the crew, whose open-mouthed ogling of that spectacle coached viewers to feel horrified yet titillated by this murderous planet. By contrast, after the loud explosion and visual drama of the lightning striking his endangered crewman, and an obligatory closeup of the commander yelling in vain, Tamahori's quiet but evocative corpse shot, edited in to hold more than a few seconds, reduces the character's passing into a natural phenomenon, "witnessed" first by the impassive, alien ecosystem surrounding him, an ambiguous identificatory trick that makes the fellow astronauts' dramatic responses that follow feel unimportant. Early in the episode, one crew member delivers Bradbury's line to illustrate the humans' disrespect of the complex Venusian ecosystem, "And we want to colonize this puddle?" This dialog allows Tamahori to later connect such anticolonial themes within Bradbury's script, that highlight the men's anthropocentrism, with a directing language articulating the planet as an intimately unfriendly, intricately powerful force about which the human crew is lethally ignorant.

“Silent Towns”: Mitigating Retrogressive Heterosexism Through Colorful Production Design and Nuanced Performance

Tamahori’s sensibility about holistic ecosystems helps him construct a different alien world, that of Bradbury’s Mars, in “Silent Towns” (season 6, episode 17). This satirical horror tale with romantic-comedy overtones begins in a dystopian future in which Earth’s government and people have just abandoned the Martian colony, mass-migrating in rockets back to their home planet. The evacuation unintentionally leaves behind the last human male and female, who confront the comically terrifying prospect of dating each other, lonely strangers in a post-apocalyptic landscape of silent storefronts, offices, and houses.

Just as Tamahori later uses ironic juxtaposition within his opening sequence of *Once Were Warriors* (1994)—where the camera’s first shot, a panoramic landscape of an idealized, unsettled Aotearoa, pulls back to reveal the view as a commercial billboard atop a dirty building in the industrialized, poverty-stricken, urban reality of modern New Zealand—he juxtaposes compositional elements within the Martian landscape to demarcate the peaceful natural beauty of the planet’s unsettled regions from the land’s disfigurement and damage around such colonial ghost towns. Unlike the other directors of *TRBT* scripts adapted from the acclaimed short-story collection, *The Martian Chronicles* (1950), Tamahori uses outdoor locations and sets to depict how Mars’ original geology contrasts with the same land marred by Earth development and construction. He includes scenic shots of Aotearoa’s stunning mountain ranges, shown in the distance during travel sequences in which the hero drives hundreds of miles from his own settlement, first towards, then hastily away from the town where the heroine lives. To highlight human impacts upon the Martian ecosystem, Tamahori centers the episode’s color palette around the strikingly red earth of the planet’s ground so as to expose the damage in settled areas that had undergone invasive digging and destruction. In his compositions, the highly pigmented crimsons, rusts, and oxbloods of Mars’ ever-present dirt sear across the bottom third-to-half of the frame throughout the episode’s first half, staining the underside of the hero’s car and the lower outer walls of his town’s hollow buildings. In exterior shots of the planet’s “civilized” regions, where humans have exhumed and reordered the land for water dams (such as the hero’s workplace), business establishments, and suburbs, the ground appears a stark, bloody red. But in wide shots of the unsettled regions alongside the planet’s dusty roads connecting towns, this dirt fades into ruddy browns and cinnamons in the midground, then miles beyond that, taupes and grey-

greens, before the serene grey-blue of white-topped mountain peaks. These hued layers remind viewers that the deeper crust of the planet is a foreign red, its innards only exposed due to the excavating violence of Earth occupation. Tamahori uses such production design and place-conscious cinematography, which map the land's larger ecology, to create an alien sense of place within which to frame the very 1950s-US-style heteronormative gender behavior that operates at the story's core.

In "Silent Towns," red not only operates as a symbol of Mars' special geology and aggressive human colonization, but also participates in a larger production design around which Tamahori rallies fashion-related expressive elements of *mise-en-scène*. Connecting color motifs to canny choices in makeup, hairstyle, and clothing, he orchestrates a multilayered visual signature. Tamahori sets up the episode's foundational color scheme from its second shot that carves the planet into three bright tones: the freakish red of the disturbed Martian land, the stunning blue of the high alien sky, the white of the planet's billowy clouds. Viewers encounter dam worker Walter Gripp for the first time, his voice heard over a shot of a phone visible through the open window in the Mars Irrigation Board office, as he interrogates the answering machine as to why he has not heard from anyone, starting to confront the frightening fact of his planetary isolation.

Walter's travels will mirror through color his subsequent emotional journey. In many exterior shots, Tamahori lights the hero's face and neck with the orange-red hue of caution, underscoring the emergency situation, especially during low-angle closeups of his head against the contrasting blue sky. In interior scenes as well, as the protagonist makes his way through various vacated buildings in his town, Tamahori deploys differently colored gel filters to signal Walter's rising anxiety. Sickly neon green reflects the last man's budding insanity, when he visits a drinking establishment, playing both customer and bartender in a mad self-dialog. The same green lighting represents Walter's desperation when he consults the phone utility's computer banks to investigate which Martian businesses might still be populated, searching for the last woman on the planet, whom he's learned about through an earlier phone message. The only relief from this cacophonous language of cautionary orange and hysterical green is the deep electric blue, soothing black, and projector-light white of the darkened movie theater, where Walter views a classical Hollywood film of people dancing, relaxing momentarily while wrapped in the magic of cinema. But he immediately leaves town

once he connects over the phone with the story's heroine, Genevieve Selsor, to find this last woman on the planet who lives hundreds of miles away.

In the climactic third act, Tamahori draws upon this established color scheme to rework what could be a trite, cautionary tale ending in a sexist punchline (e.g. "what if you were the last man on the planet, but the last woman is fat, socially inept, and marriage-crazy?"). He wrangles new moments of charm and empathy from the dated script, texturing its written story through sophisticated choices in fashion, set design, and dialog delivery. Though many of Bradbury's *TRBT* teleplays feature smart, powerful, empathetic female characters in complicated, non-heteronormative relationships with men and each other (e.g., "The Dead Man" [1992]; "The Day It Rained Forever" and "Exorcism" [1990]; "On the Orient, North" and "The Small Assassin" [1988]), "Silent Rains" proceeds from the retrogressively heterosexist premise that, while both Walter and Genevieve might share loneliness, the need for a mate, and a 1950s-era pop-cultural shallowness, Genevieve wields less value in their negotiated exchange due to her heavy weight, non-gender-conforming "ugly" behavior, and strident desperation to be wed. For visual intermediations of the written story, this elusive balance between horror and humor relies both on how Walter physically reacts to Genevieve, and how she presents herself within the frame. "Silent Rains" is an example of how a written plot might be powerfully revoked by its visual presentation. An adapter of the script could play up Walter's shallow reactions against the woman's looks and his comical repulsion by her escalating behavior, or Genevieve's tragic ignorance of beauty standards and her sad neediness for a spouse, or could discover other emotional registers in between. Tamahori opts for using the teleplay adaptation as a chance to show off refined directorial skills.

Bradbury's teleplay restricted Tamahori to this limited narrative arc for his heroine: Genevieve labors to style herself for the couple's initial meeting, making a grand entry within the Martian Mystery Beauty Salon; invites Walter on a first date at a nearby store, where she has not only assembled a candlelit dinner, but also appears optimistically in a wedding gown; then hints strongly about marriage, sex, and babies, which sends a freaked-out Walter back to his car, to return to his hometown, preferring lifelong planetary solitude to her company. Tamahori demonstrates an empathetic vision of these interactions by juggling production design with performance. He depicts Genevieve as sheltered but spunky, and Walter as bemusedly entertained but respectfully uninterested, moving away from the morally black-

and-white, sexist adaptations by other visual artists, such as an earlier *Weird Fantasy* rendition from EC Comics, edited by Al Feldstein and penciled and inked by Reed Crandall (1953). Crandall picked up on Bradbury and Feldstein's written cues, in which Genevieve does not know how to apply makeup, drawing her own brows too thinly and not removing food traces from her greasy lips before slathering red well past her natural lipline to compensate for a too-thin mouth. Following the Bradbury-Feldstein script, Crandall drew Genevieve selecting a dress inappropriately bright (colorist Marie Severin opted for canary yellow) for her big body, a written detail that Crandall supplemented by adding body-enlarging horizontal stripes across the torso. These visual elements positioned Genevieve as physically monstrous, with a stone-faced Walter an unwilling victim of her desire.

Tamahori instead transforms Genevieve into a refined and stylized, if zaftig, postwar beauty queen, her neat hair (initially described in the Bradbury-Feldstein version as resembling a messy bird's nest, then later, wet dog fur) piled into a skillfully teased pompadour bouffant, its red-gold-orange shade matching tasteful hoop earrings. Under the poufy top, Genevieve's hairstyle falls into pulled-back tresses at the sides, making her face look smaller than that of the same character as illustrated by Crandall, whose messy and wet hair called attention to her jowly double chins. Under Tamahori's direction, Genevieve sports well-executed arched eyebrows, smoky eyeshadow, and carefully drawn, neutral red-pink lips, her style reflecting the changing idealization of female fashion icons of the era in which Bradbury had written his original tale, the historical phasing from wartime pinup girl into postwar "mod chick." Genevieve's lipstick shade echoes the manicured, pink nails which she displays while resting her hand against the doorframe through which she first appears, a vision against the salon's blue wall, posing subtly in a loose black smock that conceals the size of her body. Whereas the original written version portrayed Genevieve's beauty efforts as noticeably failing, Tamahori uses a coordinated color and fashion scheme to signal her aesthetic mastery. His unveiling of Genevieve as fashionably accomplished, thus leaves the ethical responsibility up to Walter (and through him, the audience), to either display a shallow judgment about her largeness, or a mature valuation of her as a sweet, overprotected, if intensely goal-oriented woman.

In the dinner sequence as well, Tamahori returns to his color scheme of the "magical" moment in the movie theater—dousing the store's interior in black, he lights Genevieve's wedding dress with electric blue tones from behind, transforming her into a

surreal white creature enveloped in an azure halo. She appears as an unorthodox fairytale vision, not a grotesque gargoyle.

The performers' facial and bodily expressions in the "dating" scenes portray Genevieve as purposeful and plucky, despite the dialog revealing her naivete about men and the script calling for her increasingly aggressive pursuit of Walter that enacts this lack of sexual experience. Hers are not the scattered or flighty movements of a needful woman; even when the script calls for Genevieve unexpectedly donning the bridal gown for the couple's dinner, the female performer serves herself then eats the food with thoughtful, tightly controlled actions bespeaking dignity. In contrast with the EC Comics version that offers Walter's humorously blank face, which often betrays thinly disguised repulsion, the expressions of Tamahori's male performer range from smiling and joking, to pausing thoughtfully as if intending to speak with honesty, to considerately masking his confusion and irritation, to looking warmly upon the female actor as her confidences reveal both inexperience and chutzpah. Tamahori's elaborately paced timing and his performers' delicate line delivery emphasize Walter's awareness of Genevieve's limitations; his sincere enjoyment of her earnest imagination, and his ongoing, internal struggle over how not to hurt her. When he finally flees the date and her town without explanation, viewers see a closeup of her disappointed expression. But then the next shot, a medium one, has her turning towards the right side of the frame, her eyes following his car as it drives away. In her blue-lit white dress, supernaturally pale skin, red lips, and golden hair, she seems to swivel mechanically, nonhuman, a ghost in a ghost town, disappointed that the remaining human has left. Tamahori opted to feature Walter's cowardly avoidance of confrontation over reducing Genevieve to a crudely fat-shaming, satirical object.

"Usher II": Theatrical Blocking, Lighting, and Edits Transform a Strong Script into a Stylized, Dystopian Gothic

Tamahori's directorial strategy did not only re-envision (e.g. "The Long Rains") and redress (e.g. "Silent Towns") the written-narrative dimension of Bradbury's teleplays. For one episode, he closely adapted the script as a jumping-off point to showcase a stylized engagement with film genre—in particular, gothic horror. By demonstrating memorable, cinematic genre techniques, he enhanced the exchange value of his labor within the directorial market, augmenting his commercial portfolio for future gigs. Before the two other episodes, Tamahori was selected by Bradbury to televisualize one of the series' strongest

scripts, “Usher II” (season 5, episode 5), based on the author’s short-fiction precursor to the novel *Fahrenheit 451*. The well-crafted teleplay constitutes a horror fan’s dream, as it sets up fantastic-literature fanboy Stendahl as a victim of dystopian book-burning who plots revenge on the perpetrators, bureaucrats from the oppressive settler state of Earth. This state, which in 2125 governs the Martian colony in which the story transpires, had banned all fantastic texts, especially horror stories, destroying Stendahl’s vast book collection in the opening scene and the protagonist’s traumatic flashbacks. Stendahl engineers a “desolate and terrible” haunted castle, the Second House of Usher, as a “sanctuary for the imagination,” inside which elaborate scenes from Edgar Allen Poe’s terrifying tales are reenacted by robots designed as horror-genre archetypes, including ghosts, witches, bats, and other ghastly creatures. He tricks the state’s investigator Garrett, who has ordered the architectural masterpiece destroyed, and members of the Moral Climate council which Garrett heads, into touring Usher’s theme-park-like interior before its demise, during which time the narrow-minded state officials, ignorant of classic works of horror and fantasy, get tormented then murdered by the robots, their bodies replaced by mechanical doubles, so as to trick the survivors into remaining until they, too, are tortured to death. Unlike his efforts for “Downwind from Gettysburg” (season 6, episode 18), shot at Disneyland’s Hall of Presidents to feature the theme park’s animatronic Lincoln in that *TRBT* episode, Bradbury could not arrange, through his longtime Disney connections, to procure real robots for the New Zealand set of “Usher II.” So once more, Tamahori—allowed a single major Hollywood effect, that of a superimposed ghost, whose translucent form floats between Stendahl and Garrett early in the episode—resorted to the low-budget visual tricks of character blocking in conjunction with theatrical lighting and edits to create a wondrous televisual gothic that picked up on cues in Bradbury’s written story.

Tamahori deploys a visually doubled narrative sequence as the backbone of this gothic. First, he introduces the detailed gothic setting of the castle’s interiors, created by the show’s production designers. Second, to foreground the corporeal gothic, he shrinks these surroundings visually via a stagey lighting scheme that focalizes several classically embodied horror icons (a robotic rat; the projected ghost; the spectralized villain, Garrett; a murdering witch). The first sequence manipulates the movements of Stendahl and his architect, Mr. Bigelow, through the castle, so that as the men deliver introductory exposition about the episode’s backstory, they walk by objects signifying the gothic—high ceilings, arched

doorways and buttresses, stained-glass windows, sculpted columns, and finally, the tall staircase onto which they ascend—while the set is relatively well lit so that these objects remain visible. This combination of lighting with blocking—the choreographing of performers’ movements within a film set’s pre-marked areas, so as to optimize a script’s emotional nodes, as their characters render particular dialog or actions—gifts horror fans with the satisfaction of absorbing details of this spooky setting without time-consuming, narratively separate, camera tricks such as pans and cuts. The second half of this doubled narrative occurs when, in a parallel scene, Stendahl and Garrett again cross the same interior landscape to climb the same flights of stairs, but this time, primarily “lit” by a candelabra torch carried by Stendahl, in an encompassing darkness only broken by occasional fill lights to reveal an odd arch’s relief, or a column’s single side. This initial confrontation between protagonist and antagonist is blocked, shot, and edited with precision, as the camera follows the lighted areas within the otherwise-blackened frame to emphasize which character now holds dialogic power in their exchange. Tamahori first centers the light around Stendahl’s head, as he talks about the castle project, with occasional red-gold spillovers to a shadowy Garrett walking beside him; then, the light gets shared between the men in a continuous two-shot, as they ascend the stairs and converse together; finally, the torchlight flits from one character’s face to the other’s, as each moves in and out of the shadows, struggling to control the conversation. To build tension so that Garrett’s threat to Stendahl becomes clear, Tamahori blocks the next sequence so that Stendahl, head lit by the candelabra, crosses from the right to left side of the screen, passing behind a shadowy column. The director uses this movement as a concealed editing wipe, dousing the whole frame in black as Stendahl moves behind the darkened column, his once-lit body merging with its shadows as the camera follows him, producing a wholly black screen which foreshadows the next dramatic moment. Stendahl emerges, still lit, but now positioned in the foreground, his back facing the camera, as Garrett briefly passes behind him into the dark. Stendahl stares ahead towards the blackened end of the deep space before him, which holds visual tension. After a beat, Tamahori re-lights Garrett standing in that black spot, through a theatrically red-orange keylight that abruptly reveals his head. The timing and starkness of this technique makes that keylight operate like a spotlight, Garrett’s reappearance an act of magic. The camera then pushes in for a dramatic closeup during which Garrett threatens to burn down the Second House of Usher by midnight. The sequence makes the Morals Climate bureaucrat appear to

control light and darkness, as well as the episode's narrative direction. Tamahori proves showy, eloquent, delicious.

The case of Lee Tamahori's storytelling contributions to *TRBT* demonstrates how horror as a cinematic and televisual genre offers the ideal ground over which to engage in debates over directing versus screenwriting authorship. Visceral, corporeal, and atmospheric, the horror genre works primarily not through written and cognitive elements such as dialog or plot, but rather, through onscreen kinesthetics of body, color, motion, pacing, and environment. Tamahori's signature directorial style, both indigenous and feminist, Antipodean and global, took the gift of Bradbury's gothic imagination—wherein alien planets drive astronauts to death, last women distress last men into desiring lifelong bachelorhood, and wronged bibliophiles seek vengeance for censorship—and re-“scripted” it into a freshly fantastic voice.

“Evaluation”: Community-Industry-Community Circuits Of Native Labor, From Culture Work To Survivance (/Excellence) Gigs, And Back

While mass-media corporations integrate “evaluation”—the stage of audience reception, response, interpretation, identification, criticism, and, most important for such firms during this phase of cultural production, consumption—projecting their voracious circular trek of feedback-production-marketing-feedback well into the future; for indigenous screen writers, screenwriters, and other creative-industry narrative artists from Native communities, performing the paid labor of Hollywood falls within a larger set of economic practices aimed towards survivance, what Gerald Vizenor describes as an “active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion; survivance is the continuation of stories, not a mere reaction, however pertinent” (1). Indigenous creative labor within capitalism, as an affirmative and futuristic response to this dynamic colonial institution, insists on existing intractably outside it even as it creates within it for the structure's shallow short-term profit, in ways that insist upon both surviving and succeeding its monstrous presence. My final two historical case studies suggest that an “indigenous excellence” approach to the field of screenwriting (in the one-word sense here) views it as an elite and very imperial form requiring decolonial efforts. As a tactic towards “quality” scriptwriting, Native screenwriters attempt to bring community values and perspectives into this mass-medial story form, engaging the industry headquarters—commonly located within those major media cities, Global North metropolises and financial centers of empire—as a colonial battlefield in which

political allies are critical. In corporate mass media, this means workplace and industry mentors, who guide but also nurture and protect.

Okinawan Kinjo Tetsuo: Japan's Beloved Ultra TV Series Engages Imperial Science and Technology

Kinjo (family name) Tetsuo, Uchinanchu teleplay writer and TV producer specializing in *tokusatsu* (“special [effects] filming” aka live-action science fiction, fantasy, and superhero genres) and *kaiju* (a live-action genre marked especially by monsters, often alien creatures portrayed as fighting giant robots or superheroes), exemplified this tradition of Native storytelling excellence. Born into a war-ravaged Okinawa, invaded and occupied for 400 years by Japan then depopulated through World War II’s genocidal Battle of Okinawa, in which a fourth of the Native Uchinanchu population died under the hands of US military and Japanese Imperial forces, Kinjo left this ancestral homeland as a young adult in the postwar era, when his high-achieving academic performance got him into a university in Japan’s media capital of Tokyo, during an era where Okinawans, as second-class citizens of empire, had to bring passports to travel to the main Japanese islands. A writing job with the newly created Tsuburaya Productions followed, as Kinjo’s imaginative reputation within Tokyo creative-industry circles put him in touch with tokusatsu auteur founder Tsuburaya Eiji and his writing colleague Sekizawa Shin’ichi, who had earlier helped Toho Studios build its era-defining science fiction film series, most notably the *Godzilla* films of the 1950s. Surrounded by Japanese artist coworkers, as a Native screenwriter, Kinjo relied upon Tsuburaya to recognize his talents and give him appropriate job responsibilities and statuses that reflected the value of those artistic abilities. Tsuburaya did not just let Kinjo write, but promoted him to production manager and head of the planning and literary departments of the then-small company (Ragone 84).

Under Tsuburaya’s mentorship and support, Kinjo created or co-created the *Ultra Q*, *Ultraman*, and *Ultra 7* shows in the mid-1960s for Tsuburaya Productions and Tokyo Broadcasting System, largely considered the hallmark of the companies’ beloved science fiction TV work, and followed up in the next decades by other “Ultra” series. In postwar Japan, when antiwar themes reached their peak within popular culture in the 1960s and 1970s, Kinjo worked among a generation of young entertainment-industry artists and screenwriters such as Sekizawa, who used mass-medial genre in film and TV to interrogate the decisions and values of the older Japanese who had supported empire, colonialism,

fascism, and militarism. Seen as the leading figure of the Golden Age of the Japanese Science Fiction Film, Tsuburuya and his team imported the popular cinematic genres of tokusatsu and kaiju to TV, and sought out surplus labor that would enrich the genres' commerciality by providing special content not before seen on television. Scholar August Ragone observes that Tsuburuya valued Kinjo's special talent and creativity and took him under his wing as a future television manager and visionary:

He relied on the young writer to help develop many key ideas and themes in teleplays laced with introspection and social commentary, characteristics that would become synonymous with the early works of Tsuburuya Productions. Kinjo's passionate energy, along with his clever and insightful writing, helped make the studio's films and TV shows more than mere escapist entertainment—they became poetic treatises disguised as science fiction. (84)

Perhaps the most evident use of science fiction as a political mode of commercial storytelling is my favorite among the Ultra series, *Ultra 7* (Tokyo Broadcasting System, 1967-1967) which I grew up watching as a child when the English-dubbed versions aired in the 1970s. At the time, with this heavily curated-for-the-US version, I did not realize that the episodes, written or shepherded through by showrunner Kinjo, had been controversial in Japan. They frequently used the tokusatsu genre, figuring interactions between *kaiju* (monsters), aliens, superheroes, and distressed humans as thinly veiled allegories about war, colonization, racism, occupation, poverty, and other social issues, because so many of the episodes had been censored or outright banned in his colonizing country. As an overseas fan and point of global cultural reception, I mostly remember what a big deal the series had been for Asian American ethnic media such as JN Productions, headed by local Hawai'i producer and entrepreneur Joanne Ninomiya, a production company that started by airing Japanese television shows then transitioning into other Asian and global translated TV episodes. JN Productions was a small media firm that made its bones by finding such global (Japanese) properties, translating them using contract work, and broadcasting these versions to regional US and Asian American audiences. It rolled out its special broadcast of *Ultra 7* with a full publicity tour of the islands, including children's membership in the Ultra 7 club (the card of which I still own), and local performances of human-sized kaiju and Japanese superheroes fighting each other at local shopping centers, such as the Maui Mall, where I recall enjoying the goofy, family-friendly stagings. *Ultra 7* was one of many tokusatsu TV shows from Japan

aired by KIKU in the 1970s, which Asian American settler artists and writers raised in Hawai‘i such as Filipino-Korean Jon Jay Murakami and Okinawan Lee Tonouchi today remember with nostalgia (*Kikaida*, *Kamen Rider*, etc.) as part of “local” identity, a settler-colonial identity which in this case got its start in global and regional capital.

Of elementary school age when it aired, I do not remember the powerful cultural politics exhibited in episodes such as “*Nonmaruto no Shisha*” (“The Nonmartan Ambassador”), which opens by showing how humans have started to go beyond destroying Earth’s land and air—occupying their ecosystems with destructive waves of extractive industries, construction, pollution, and other forms of “development”—to mining the ocean floor as well as planning to build undersea cities. Though from today’s perspective this story’s premise seems far-fetched and science fictional, I remember from working for visionary ocean engineer Dr. John Craven, once Governor Ariyoshi’s Marine Affairs Advisor and head of the US Navy’s Polaris nuclear-submarine project, that Craven and Kikutake Kiyonori, Japan’s premier “environmental” architect, had teamed up in the 1960s through 1970s to develop Kikutake’s “Marine City” vision (originally unveiled as part of a larger industrial-artistic mission in the 1960 World Design Conference in Tokyo) into a full floating cities project which would use occupied Hawai‘i as one experimental base. So in Japanese popular culture of this episode’s broadcast era, the concept of an undersea city was not only viewed as viable technologically, but immediately feasible. (After a lot of patriotic media noise—publicity on floating cities having reflected the US settler state’s efforts to celebrate the American bicentennial by representing the promise of imperial scientific futures—the experimental floating city notoriously sank in Kane‘ohe Bay.)³⁶

At the time “*Nonmaruto no Shisha*” originally aired, such global allied efforts of imperial industry, combining the violent political legitimacy of the US and Japanese settler states with the ontological legitimacy of capitalistic science and technology, were attempting to fuse gargantuan architectural megastructures with “organic” processes, materials, and concepts. Not impressed by US and Japanese media’s romance with hegemonic industrial science, the episode offers a science fictional challenge to the milieu’s celebrations of such “innovative” partnerships, an ecological and anticolonial critique that seems well ahead of its time. Thematically speaking, the episode carries all the hallmarks of Japanese tokusatsu-genre TV, such as Gairos, the monster of the week, and the Nonmartans, weird aliens of the week.

At its start, Shin'ichi, a mysterious boy that haunts a local beach, warns the show's heroes that the sudden blowing up of the humans' underwater base was not an accident. This exchange is between Shin'ichi and Anne, the superhero Ultra 7's love interest and coworker in his secret identity as part of the Ultra Guard, a sort of Earth defense force:

Anne: Why was the underwater base destroyed??
Shin'ichi: Because the Nonmartans got angry.
Anne: But why?
Shin'ichi: The bottom of the ocean is theirs.
Anne: Who are the Nonmartans?
Shin'ichi: They're the real Earth people.
Anne: Earth people—
Shin'ichi: That's right. This planet belonged to them before humankind settled on the continents. Humans drove them into the sea. Humans think they own the Earth, but the truth is, they're the Earth's invaders.
Anne: [Gasping] *Humans—are the Earth's invaders?!*
Shin'ichi: [Nods]
Anne: No!—that can't be!
Shin'ichi: ...Humans are deceitful and selfish. They drove the Nonmartans out to the sea floor, and now this—!
Anne: You're human, too. It's only natural for humans to think of their own interests. The bottom of the sea contains many resources important to us.
Shin'ichi: The Nonmartans are much, much more important!

This exchange is a reminder of the four-century colonization of Okinawa by Japan, a brutally unequal history known well to Uchinanchu, here symbolized by the Nonmartans and spoken for by the boy, who turns out to be a human ghost, but little thought of by Japanese, whom Anne and humankind obviously represent. For both Japanese and Okinawan viewers, it also no doubt stirred memories of the postwar US occupation of their joint nations—a thematic narrative technique that temporarily equalizes but also, paired with questions such as “Who are the real Earth people?”, forces Japanese audiences to reflect upon the deeper questions of who had been in “their” land before the Japanese settled, and

of the nature of the relationship of this original Earth people to the planet's resources, as well.

In addition to such blunt representations of settler colonialism and racism, Kinjo's other episodes addressed the Vietnam War, genocide, and social alienation. I do not remember these specific themes but do recall as a child being struck by the strongly sentimental tone of the show, which I now recognize as the product of tremendous skills at Japanese genre screenwriting. Modern Japanese popular culture, shaped by centuries of fascism and strong social order during the Tokugawa period and evolving into mass-produced forms from the Meiji era onward, utilizes sentimentality in powerful artistic ways that might be viewed as kitschy and super-emotional to outsiders. Japanese consider Westerners such as North Americans, for example, to be "dry" emotionally, whereas a primary business and social mode for relationships in this culture where long-term, even inter-generational, social connections are key, is "wet," as exaggerated but conventionalized emotional performances lubricate rigid social structures, making institutional violence survivable and acceptable, even romanticized. Anne's melodramatic, if didactic, repetition of Shin'ichi's lines, her heightened negative reaction when he introduces to her a completely different, pro-indigenous worldview, and the normally sweet female character's angry projection of her own colonial complicity upon the boy (i.e. the "You're human too" accusation), exhibit exquisite formal knowledge of Japanese narrative sentiment in the dialog form. As an adult and genre theorist, I also admire the plotting sophistication. Shin'ichi is a ghost within a science fictional story about the ecological and colonial harms of science and technology, his organic trait of being a dead child characterizing him as post- or super-human rather than as a markedly weird, fantastic spirit in the Western sense, especially juxtaposed against Anne's militaristic role as an enforcer of that Earth "defense" (i.e. invasion) force. They are both humans, but Shin'ichi's afterlife wisdom positions him as able to offer political and ethical critique of his (former) race.

Samoan John Kneubuhl: The Serious, Surrealist Contribution of Indigenous Clowning to The Wild, Wild West

Much has been made, especially by indigenous Oceanic and Pacific studies scholars, of John Kneubuhl, the celebrated Samoan playwright, director, and screenwriter who went from American Samoa to Punahou School in Honolulu to Yale University, where the *afakasi*

prodigy studied under Thornton Wilder; back to Honolulu where he wrote and directed for one of the city's premiere theaters; then to Hollywood television networks for several decades, where as a working teleplay writer, he helped shape the First Golden Age of TV; and finally, returning to Samoa, where Kneubuhl wrote and produced some of his most important plays (Heim 142). Fellow Samoan writer Caroline Sinavaina-Gabbard (186), as well as many scholars since, assess his contemporary reimagining of *Fale Aitu*, an indigenous storytelling tradition of socially licensed, satirical comedy sketches in which authority figures are mocked, local gossip dramatized and politicized, and power structures symbolically overturned in a joyfully carnivalesque and curative (Kneubuhl's own word for its magic) theater. Tongan scholar Caroline Johansson, in her thesis about adapting Kneubuhl's plays, notes additionally that what Kneubuhl himself had called the "mocking" aspect of *Fale Aitu* qualifies it as a "meta" theatrical practice (50-51). As a theater director herself, Johansson observes that "Kneubuhl's plays demand that the audience perform a double act, in that they think about and react to the action taking place on the stage," and attributes this quality to Kneubuhl's creolizing of *Fale Aitu* with Modernist dramatic tricks that the Samoan playwright absorbed at Yale, influenced by then-experimental stage writers such as Wilder and Strindberg (54-55). Moved especially by Brecht and Pirandello, who provide formal narrative structures in which to house *Fale Aitu* orientations and story conventions, Kneubuhl was to craft richly experimental stageplays such as *A Play: A Play* and other "meta" Pasifika works. Scholars such as Stan Orr (2015) demonstrate how Kneubuhl used this blend of experimental modernism and Native content in his single, indigenous Hawaiian-themed episode of the cop show *Hawai'i Five-O*, but it was fantastic TV that offered Kneubuhl the most opportunities to play with this narrative strategy.

During his stint in Hollywood, Kneubuhl especially honed the craft of these Modernist-Samoan fusings in *The Wild, Wild West* (CBS, 1965-1969), a boldly mixed-genre science fiction, espionage, and Western series that many millennial science fiction scholars consider to be "slipstream." Blending genres in odd but fresh ways towards storytelling innovation, this show fit the trans-genre writer perfectly. It maintains a loyal fan base to this day due to its strongly auteurist, unique voice. Kneubuhl is beloved and known most by the series' fans for his creation of popular antagonist Miguelito Loveless, a Bondlike supervillain of part-Spanish, part-white ancestry who resents US imperialism and whose dwarfish appearance and fiendish humor drew strong ratings. As the show's most popular antagonist,

Loveless, in the words of Pacific film scholar Sarina Pearson, was “three feet ten inches of postcolonial malevolence, driven primarily by a compulsion to reclaim the vast estates confiscated by the United States Government from his Mexican grandmother.” Pearson and others have noted parallels between Kneubuhl and Loveless, and interpreted how the Loveless-themed televisual texts present obvious anti-colonial messages, such as that villain pointing a map to indicate his grandmother’s former land, taken by Spain and then the US, that happens to occupy most of contemporary California—the home of Hollywood and Kneubuhl’s own industry—cheekily proclaiming, “piracy!”³⁷ As a longtime fan, I will focus instead on how the production relations of this show allowed for both optimal and maximal artistic expression for such an exceptional indigenous writer as Kneubuhl. Talented indigenous artists and talented artists of color are not uncommon; however, in the precarious work environment of Hollywood, where union membership relies upon maintaining regular employment from gig to gig, even for talented white screenwriters, the task of creating then continuing to write the same popular character, requires very finessed fighting—even more so if the writer belongs to a “minority” population.

Kneubuhl authored five of the ten episodes where Loveless appeared, with his scripts not just presenting a greater range of complexity of the joyfully malevolent character than the five other screenplays, but also laced with levels of postmodern sophistication that diverse racial-ethnic audiences within the US might interpret differently. For example, in Loveless’s introductory episode, “The Night the Wizard Shook the Earth,” during one of the first scenes where viewers witness Loveless in his elaborate mansionlike home, he sings a charming duet of “Bring a Little Water, Silvy” with a member of his harem of beautiful, usually white, female companions, while she plays the harpsichord, before the white-male protagonist, US governmental spy James West, whom he holds hostage in that dressing room. For white audiences, this scene’s powerful weirdness plays on the tensions produced by this postcolonial villain caught in the trappings of upper-class interior decor and dress, musical selection, and refined performance—especially since Irish-Mexican actor Michael Dunn pitches the tune in a tremulous, delicate, and sensitive voice.

In a Fale Aitu-meets-Brecht maneuver, however, Kneubuhl was clowning mainstream US audiences, even as Loveless seems to be straightforwardly entertaining the hero (albeit in captivity). The baroque, delicate harpsichord duet was not classical music, but an African American folk song originally made famous when adapted and performed by

blues singer Lead Belly (aka Huddie William Ledbetter, 1888-1949), a popular black entertainer who came of age in the US Reconstruction era. African American viewers might thus wonder why the singer-narrator would ask Silvy for water in the context of this song's folkloric emergence, during a time when white reaction against recent black freedom was hostile, terroristic, even murderous (i.e. the historic emergence of the KKK). They might recall the urban-legendary history of Lead Belly as one of white institutional violence—the singer had been, after all, jailed several times for murder or attempted murder, but was as often pardoned or released early, ostensibly due to the influence of his beautiful voice over various state governors. If they were fans, the audience would know that Lead Belly participated in a complicated, unequal relationship with folklorist John Lomax, whom the musician drove around the South so that the scholar could collect folk music, but who also took the African American on college tours to East Coast campuses, a kind of postcolonial object of admiration. Like Loveless, whom Kneubuhl has described as locked in a “Miltonian war with god,” Lead Belly was a complicated, criminal genius born into the wrong historical situation. Reception of this short scene gets richer, the more the cultural layers of understanding unfold. Theatrical performances by men of color before white audiences include the Samoan afakasi Kneubuhl before his white TV writing-producing colleagues (and audiences), the “Spanish half-breed” (Kneubuhl's words) Loveless before his white enemy West, the African American Lead Belly before early-twentieth-century US academics at Harvard, the Smithsonian, and an MLA meeting at Bryn Mawr.

Such wittily postmodern narrative layering was appreciated by Kneubuhl's bosses, including show creator and sometime showrunner Michael Garrison, an out-gay TV auteur constantly at odds with CBS over the series' budget and weird approaches to Hollywood genre, and producer Fred Freiberger, who brought him onto the show. When Freiberger and Garrison were ousted from the show, and a reinstated Garrison later died, the succeeding white producers did not respect Kneubuhl's approach of dramatizing Loveless' humanism beneath the absurdism and action, allowing him to slip in political content, so Kneubuhl left the show. “Silly as the whole thing was, it was seriously silly,” Kneubuhl later reflected. The Samoan surrealism, Fale Aitu expressionism, and layered artistry of his scripts vanished, and the remaining Loveless episodes turned the character into a predictable stock villain. On the Fordist assembly line of First Golden Age TV production, where creative work had to be

generated on a tight deadline, such cosmopolitan, capable genre experimentation often escaped the skills of the teleplay writers who wrote the other Loveless episodes.

Native screen writing and screenwriting labor help tell audio-visual stories in ways that on the surface might not seem particularly indigenous, including following the form of Western commercial genres, but that possess subtle yet undeniable cultural sensibilities. These indigenous forms of scripting comprise a continuity of non-capitalist, community storytelling in which Native narrative labor was linked inextricably to a larger planetary timescape of ancestral land, regional genealogies and histories, and the social reproduction of spiritually grounded, responsible tribal and family relationships through cultural narrative tools that have survived invasion, occupation, disease, genocide, state violence, family separation and destruction, diaspora, assimilation, and both the economic ravages and impoverished, primitive story structures of capitalism itself.

Tamahori, Kinjo, and Kneubuhl are non-ironically labeled “pioneers” by studies scholars, because their tremendous artistic skills were practiced against the backdrop of a racist, indigenous-phobic, corporate mass media context. It is my argument that their Native orientation aided them in artistic as well as business survival. Their “excellence” derived from never leaving community, using capitalistic work to sharpen their storytelling skills, and viewing corporate-media labor as merely a set of gigs, not a full work identity. When Tamahori’s last US blockbuster films proved financially disappointing (2005’s *xXx: State of the Union* and 2007’s *Next*) and he suffered from a transphobic scandal in hypocritical Hollywood, he returned to New Zealand to make global films, both indigenous and international in theme: *Mahana*, a New Zealand adaptation of Witi Ihimaera’s LGBTQ novel, and *The Devil’s Double*, a Belgian-Dutch production about an Iraqi man who resembles Saddam Hussein’s son. His assessment of Hollywood’s dreaded “directing jail,” in which after losing studio money, filmmakers are rarely allowed to work again, which many directors fear tremendously, reflected a global as well as indigenous orientation:

I’m back to doing independent films now because I like it and I want to work in New Zealand. I’m very happy to be home and I want to do some films there as well as in the rest of the world. (Barlow)

The logic of the directing jail is the logic of capital, whereby directors are driven by fear of failing to generate satisfactory levels of corporate profit that the Hollywood factory trains all creative labor think lie at the heart of the filmmaking mission. However, uncowed

by such “punishment,” Tamahori’s actions of returning home then proceeding with indie indigenous and global movie production reflect a larger sacred orientation of Maori moviemaking which the late Maori director and producer, Merata Mita once explained in her classic essay about how their people have viewed films as connected with the spirit, “The Soul and the Image”:

For Maori and indigenous people around the world who have their spirituality continuously under attack, sharing the dreams and visions of others is an experience beyond the self. ... Used responsibly, film can be a humanising force in an increasingly material world. ... No matter what destructive processes we have gone through and are going through, eventually the taniwha stirs in all of us and we can only be who we are. For 90 minutes or so, we have the capability of indigenizing the screen in any part of the world our films are shown. This represents power and is one reason we make films which are uniquely and distinctly Maori.

At the height of his career success in Tokyo, Kinjo returned home to Okinawa and marshaled his celebrity reputation to sell fellow Uchinanchu the late-1960s/early 1970s political movement known as reversion, which attempted to de-occupy their ancestral homeland from US military and governmental presence by first having the United States return Okinawa to Japan, which would ostensibly decolonize it towards indigenous Uchinanchu governance. His life ended at 37, in a tragic accident soon after the Japanese government made its decision about reversion, when he fell drunk from the roof of his house. This event reflected the community experience of Uchinanchu betrayal by former Prime Minister Kishi Nobosuke, who cut a secret backdoor deal with President Nixon to keep Okinawa in Japanese hands so that US military bases—the source of Uchinanchu islander labor exploitation, sex assault, environmental degradation, poverty, and second-class citizenship—could remain. Japan’s betrayal was said to have affected Kinjo strongly, as some Okinawans consequently blamed his leadership of the movement as playing into the agenda of the Japanese settler state and thus American militarism. In our household, as we prepare to make Okinawan American science fiction films together, my Uchinanchu husband and I talk about this time of reversion, but it means something different to each of us. Kishi, the postwar founder of the conservative and hegemonic Liberal Democratic Party, and the creator of Japan’s most powerful political dynasty of ultra-right legislators, including the PM at the time of reversion, Kishi’s brother Satō Eisaku, as well as Kishi’s grandson, the

current Japanese PM Shinzō Abe, was a personal family friend of my maternal grandfather, who was a Republican fisherman from Kishi's prefecture (Yamaguchi) and a community leader in the United Fishing Agency. My grandparents thus greeted Kishi at Honolulu International Airport and enjoyed Japanese settler parties hosted for him when he visited. My husband wonders: did he fall accidentally, inebriated and emotionally bereft? Was he broken irreparably by what had turned out to be a strategic miscalculation—and, like the Uchinanchu student nurses during the Battle of Okinawa, who jumped off a tall sea cliff rather than be taken by American or Japanese military forces, decided death was the only ethical action? Did his thriving time in empire, in mass-media capitalism, mislead him about the political realities of his homeland?

John Kneubuhl's celebrated "third act" of his life, when he returned to his ancestral homeland to write what Pasifika and Samoan scholars consider the greatest work of his career, is often described as starting with a sudden quitting of his Los Angeles career and symbolic, if theatrical, burning of his old screenplays. Some scholars I have read remark on how surprising it is that he would leave such a moneyed commercial path in the Big Media City; some Native scholars have speculated on how not being able to tell truly indigenous Oceanic-centered and anti-colonial stories on a regular basis in Hollywood is what may have made him return. Ten years ago, I was given access to a rare oral history with the writer by a male interviewer donated to the University of Hawai'i Library's archives, a recording not yet available to the public. His niece, Samoan-Hawaiian playwright Victoria Kneubuhl, instructed the librarian to let me borrow it for a presentation I made during a Kumu Kahua Theater celebration of John Kneubuhl's life and works as part of the 2007 Fall Festival of writers sponsored by my English Department, so I listened to Kneubuhl's own account of the incident that changed his life and led him home to the islands (Kneubuhl, Enright, and DeeWees 2002). One day, he was inside of his comfortable Hollywood house, then suddenly out of nowhere, a huge wave, like a tsunami, came at him, *inside the building*, enveloping everything with visceral force and wet power. It felt real; it must have been real. Shortly thereafter, he chose to quit his screenwriting career and return to Samoa. The recording has since disappeared from where the Kneubuhl family had donated it to the UH library, and I've come to think that perhaps I imagined it, except that audio memory of sitting in the library and being truly stunned by this story felt real, too. My fantastic imagination, my deep gut which, like that of Shonda Rhimes' politico protagonist Olivia Pope of *Scandal*, is never

wrong, tells me that his Oceanic ancestors were calling Kneubuhl back home. My husband, the indigenous Uchinachu atheist and ever skeptic, says maybe he had a nervous breakdown. A true believer in fantastic genre mixing might say, why not both?

What the three Native “screen writers” share in common is a spiritual, cultural, and geographical circulation from community to industry then back to community. Excellence in indigenous storytelling in this corporate context reflects a type of work that Hardt and Negri call “immaterial labor” (108), which is at once intellectual and linguistic, as well as affective, i.e. encompassing the body and the mind. Immaterial labor is simultaneously extracted by mass-media corporations that historically have sought any kind of difference in content as a form of surplus value, and, at the same time, honed and deployed by Native workers to seek out occupational conditions which optimize their narrative and creative autonomy as well as, if possible, their workplace authority to be able continue to tell tales in meaningful ways falling under their control.

Notes

This chapter contains sections to be published in *The New Ray Bradbury Review* (2019) originally written for this dissertation.

1. Since Finke sold her alternative-media blog to Penske Media in 2009 and was fired from *Deadline Hollywood* in 2013, Deadline has de-evolved from a guerilla journalism site indicative of the resistance-rich promise of millennial media convergence, into a standard industry news outlet, betraying bias in the direction of hegemony, similar to *The Hollywood Reporter* or *Variety*. Before it was bought by Jay Penske and transformed into yet another institutional(ized) entertainment-reportage venue by her one-time disciple Mike Fleming, however, Finke had made her bones on cutting-edge, digital-era, daily reports of the workers’ responses to the Hollywood studios’ latest tactics, based on striking screenwriters emailing, phoning, faxing, and messaging her from the frontlines of this worker action—the very embodiment of digital-era “convergence culture” explained in this Chapter.
2. For a sample of Whedon’s very public, pro-strike commentary, see his November 6, 2007 entry of his *Whedonesque* blog (“IN WHICH Josh”).
3. See Wyatt (“Webisodes of ‘Lost’”), who reports on how Lindelof, together with his *Lost* co-showrunner Carlton Cuse, publicly modeled what it might look like for Hollywood studios to pay teleplay writers fairly for authoring supplementary

- webisodes of network shows—one of the digital/streaming “sell through” media demands that WGA-W had been making at the time—when he and Cuse arranged between their network, ABC, and the striking union, sample striketime production and distribution of *Lost* webisodes for which WGA writers were adequately compensated.
4. See for its publicity video of MacFarlane’s November 9, 2007, pro-strike speech (“Seth MacFarlane on Why”), and Dean for MacFarlane’s post-strike, \$100-million deal with Fox (“Seth MacFarlane’s \$2 Billion”).
 5. For more on the strike’s history and key bargaining issues, see Littleton (2013) and the 2014 *Pencils Down! The 100 Days of the Writers Guild Strike* documentary by Kalata. O’Brien offers a movement perspective by members of the WGA based on the union’s informal striketime blog, *United Hollywood* (126-41).
 6. For a visual illustration of both sides of this sfnal transmedia work of resistance couture, which hangs in my closet ‘till this day, see Billington (“Get Your Writers’ Strike Swag!”). For an example of websites created by fantastic-genre TV fans—especially Whedon’s “browncoats,” hardcore Whedonverse junkies—to support the WGA strike, see the archived Fans4Writers.com.
 7. See Ridley’s explanation of his legal, legitimate choice to cross the writers’ picket line (“John Ridley Goes Fi-Core”). Because WGA membership is a condition of employment for all screenwriters, Ridley elected to resign his membership while continuing to pay Writers Guild dues and to receive union benefits, according to “fair share” and “agency shop” laws established in a US Supreme Court decision about these occupationally required fees. This mandatory union practice, established through twentieth-century worker activism during the era of labor’s decline, continues to be fought for by working-class people; see Totenberg (“Is It Fair”) regarding that decision, *Aboud v. Detroit Bd. Of Educ.*, 431 U.S. 209.
 8. White members constitute 89.7% of WGA members, according to the union’s 2014 data collection contracted to UCLA; back in 2007, the strike’s first year, it was 92.2% (Ralph J. Bunche 2016: 12).
 9. At over 130,000 attendees, SDCC is regarded as the largest such convention in North America, an annual mecca for participants in nerd/geek narrative culture as well as sf/fantasy fandom. See MacDonald (“What Are the Biggest Comic-Cons”).

10. For typical examples of praise showered on these highly topical series, see Braxton (“John Ridley Hopes”) and Tobias (“John Ridley on ‘Guerilla’”).
11. See Ridley’s *Those Who Dark in Darkness* (2005) and *What Fire Cannot Burn* (2006) for Soledad “Bullet” O’Roark’s adventures fighting super-powered beings in a dystopian future. As with other genre writers of color, Ridley started out in troped tale-telling—noir, action-comedy, science fiction, spy comedy—to “prove” his entertainment chops, but once he attracted Hollywood studios’/networks’ attention, turned to tedious but prestigious dramatic realism, to build his TV showrunning presence.
12. See for example the WGA’s public “shaming” letter to the media that proclaimed the name of each writer who had gone fi-core, an obviously stigma-pelting act condemned by one anonymous WGA member as a “new blacklist,” referencing the infamous postwar HUAC blacklisting of allegedly communist writers, performers, directors, etc., in Hollywood; see Finke for the text of the WGA statement, its listing of the “puny few” 28 fi-core writers’ names including that of Ridley, which reflect at least 11 women, and that critical response by “anotherWGAwriter” (“WGA East and West Identify”).
13. Simmons confirms that the majority of those who crossed the picket line scripted soaps (“WGA: 28 Writers Quit”); Smith additionally lays out the different production conditions faced by soap writers in contrast with other WGA members, especially how these conditions related to the union’s demands for rerun royalties and for Internet episodes (“The Suds Flow”).
14. As an example of the complicated relationship between black-male writers and their white-male producing mentors, Lucas chose McGruder to lighten up Ridley’s draft, which the *Star Wars* creator had considered too “reverent.” See Curtis on Lucas’ journey behind his last produced movie, reflecting a quiet but lifelong commitment to diversity, which he generally financed on his own due to Hollywood racism and which came out the year before he married African American financier Mellody Hobson (“George Lucas is Ready”).
15. See Hunt (12).
16. See Lee on Asian American labor and business history, especially the chapter “The Politics and Economics of Work Before the 1930s” (63-94).

17. See DiOrio for the immediate context of these informal negotiations in late January 2008, reflecting the WGA's changed position on reality/animation writers since the early December 2007, when it had refused the AMPTP's ultimatum to drop this demand ("Writers Drop Jurisdiction").
18. See Furey for an explanation of the WGA's higher-residual issue for DVDs ("WGA the Dog"). See Mapes who implies that in acquiescing to the AMPTP by not changing their DVD residual percentage of profits (0.3%) existing from before the strike, the WGA effectively let the AMPTP stick it with an outdated formula from the VHS era.
19. See Fleming for how, a half-year prior to the strike, Ridley himself had joined an experimental writers' co-operative with Christopher McQuarrie, John Lee Hancock, Naomi Foner Gyllenhall (i.e. Glenn Man's daughter's husband's ex-wife!), Graham Yost, and other respected A- and B-list scripters. This experiment effectively enacted his proposal on a small scale.
20. WGA writers in 2008, the second year of the strike, averaged a little over \$100,000 in income, solidly placing most members within the upper-middle-class. So anything in the five-figure range would be on the low side—representing the bottom of the membership who are not able to earn regular employment or who are working regularly but in low-status genres or in marginal/regional ICT firms. See Hunt (15).
21. The actual, scripted line from that film directed by Richard Donner is: "This is no fantasy, no careless product of wild imagination" (*Superman*).
22. See Jackson who refers to fantasy as "imagination in exile" (13-60); and Zipes who says, "(W)e need the fantastic for resistance" (2). Also see Todorov (25).
23. In industry parlance, a multi-hyphenate describes someone who fulfills more than one occupational role—especially relevant if one role (e.g. screenwriter) falls under the category of labor and the other (e.g. producer) falls under the category of the management.
24. Jenkins describes an aca/fan (plural, "aca/fen") as someone like him, with "one foot in academia and one foot in fandom" ("Good News for Aca/Fen").
25. My analyses is based on research conducted into Ray Bradbury's teleplay drafts and business correspondence related to *TRBT*, during summer 2017 within the Bradbury-Albright Collection of the Center for Ray Bradbury Studies (CRBS), Indiana

- University-Purdue University Indianapolis, funded by the R.D. Mullen Ph.D. Research Fellowship grant from *Science Fiction Studies* journal, and substantially assisted by staff of the CRBS.
26. Both interviews with Bradbury during initial media coverage of *TRBT* and CRBS correspondence between the author and Cotter as well as with Bradbury's agent underscore Bradbury's prioritization of personal *control* over the show's stories, chiefly through his teleplay drafts and editorial feedback to episodes' rough cuts. For example, see Edwards (1986) and Farber (1985). The emphasis on communicating emotional content via actor performance, rather than images via expensive visual effects, was described by recurring director and producer Randy Bradshaw: "The Ray Bradbury Theatre hasn't got much budget for special-effects, but it makes up for that with well-established actors who use their skills to make 'the picture come to life in the viewer's mind'" (Lacey).
 27. Producer Doug MacLeod likened making the show to shooting a mini-film each week, without a consistent set or cast, a production context in which any kind of long-term planning was difficult (Lacey).
 28. Though a minority of news coverage and CRBS correspondence references the use of an anonymous ghostwriter employed in the United Kingdom to rework Bradbury's teleplays during the show's early years (Lacey), he/she remains uncredited as a writer within the produced episodes, with media reports and most of the CRBS correspondence detailing Bradbury's heartfelt efforts to revise his own scripts, often several times a day, to retain each story's core ideas—not his responses to that writer's versions. His input did not seem to go to other executive producers who might have functioned as showrunners, but rather, to Cotter.
 29. For example, contemporary show *Amazing Stories* (1985-1987), executive-produced by film director Steven Spielberg, enjoyed about twice to three times the budget of rival fantastic anthologies of the era (see Farber) such as *TRBT*, where a typical episode only cost about \$300,000, not in the millions (Lacey). The higher budget let Spielberg hire motion-picture, not TV, directors, to ape his nostalgic, deep-focus, moving-camera style that produced what cinema formalist David Bordwell calls an "intensified continuity" (147-157).

30. Block divides film into three visual characters: story, sound, and visuals; *TRBT*'s directors wielded a degree of control over the latter two storytelling dimensions (2).
31. See Sarris.
32. See especially Maras' chapter "The Screenplay as Literature" (2009).
33. For an example of overseas television directing labor for Hollywood, when "slumming it" for DC Comics' live-action superhero *The Flash* (The CW, 2014-present), a US TV show shot in Canada, seasoned indie-cinematic auteur Kevin Smith spent many nights leaving the set to pick up large orders of hamburgers and other fast food for his whole crew while production proceeded without him, rather than overseeing much of the filming, implying that a television director's work requires so little actual artistic decision-making that the crew would be able to shoot the episode without him ("Kevin Smith").
34. *TRBT* producers shot quickly, at the efficient rate of about an episode every week, with the crew working 11-hour days. See Lacey.
35. Such as myself, employed as a work-for-hire contracted translator in the 1990s, mostly for Japanese documentary TV.
36. See especially the chapter on "Blue Revolution in Hawai'i" about the history of mining ocean energy by former Natural Energy Laboratory of Hawai'i Director and Pacific International Center for High Technology Research founder Takahashi (2007 188-192).
37. "The Night the Wizard Shook the Earth" (season 1, episode 3).

CHAPTER 3.
QUEER SPIRITUAL SHOWRUNNERS SLIPSTREAM THE SMALL SCREEN
INTO A HARM-REDUCING SENSORIUM

“It symbolizes a letting go—
of all the sad, crazy, and inhumane things
we’ve seen that day.”
—Officer Athena Grant¹

“So, here we are, Mr. Bond.
Two dead men enjoying the evening.”
—Mr. White²

DENATURALIZING HORROR: GENRE MIXING, GENREFICATION, AND THE
SURPRISINGLY GOTHIC SENSIBILITY OF SHONDALAND

Training as a TV scholar ain’t all fun-n-games. “You watch a lot of crap,” my picky writer-director husband remarks, exiting our viewing room after a brief taste of the gallons of Peak Television I guzzle down daily. A cinema snob, he is repulsed by an episode in Season 2 of *The Exorcist* (2016-2018), which by the time Fox network later cancels the demonic-possession series, will constitute the third failed attempt of Morgan Creek Productions, the licensee for that franchise’s TV remakes, to adapt the monstrously popular, formally innovative 1973 film directed by William Friedkin. Friedkin, best known for directing this flick, is a genre-breaking cinema auteur who also directed the memorably kinetic *The French Connection* (1971) which single-handedly transformed cops-n-criminals cinema, and *The Boys in the Band* (1970), cherished as a groundbreaking, milestone queer film. Though in its millennial efforts to reproduce the massive mainstream hit of the once-iconic movie series—the Friedkin version, after all, had sparked a whole “demonic possession” trend marking 1970s horror cinema (*Exorcist II: The Heretic*, the *Omen* series, *Demon Seed*, etc.)—Morgan Creek hired tried-and-true “auteur” directors such as action maven Renny

Harlin (the *Die Hard* series, *Cliffhanger*, *The Deep Blue Sea*) and prestigious artiste Paul Schrader (scripter of Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*, *Raging Bull*, and *The Last Temptation of Christ*; writer-director of *American Gigolo* and *Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters*), the company's attempts felt, if you'll excuse the pun, cursed. Still, Morgan Creek hung on, and, even after it sold much of its film library, clung to the TV rights of the once-hot property, hoping for transmedia success (Busch).

Over a decade after Schrader reworked footage from Harlin's financially and critically failed 2004 film *Exorcist: The Beginning*, combining it with new scenes and characters into a totally different, equally poorly received 2005 alternative, the firm greenlit, produced, and sold to Fox network this first television adaptation in the franchise, created and developed by newbie showrunner Jeremy Slater. A typical LA success story, Slater, a "Kansas kid who grows up burning to be a screenwriter, takes the chance of moving to California and finally manages to sell a script to MGM," rose from data entry clerk to working screenwriter when that screenplay he proffered, *Pet* (2016)—about a young woman kidnapped, caged, and held captive by a crazed fan, with whom she must engage in a battle of wits—made Hollywood agencies' rounds, earning him a "hot new kid on the block" reputation for genre writing as well as studio scripting gigs (Rochat) for upcoming horror and superhero films. Slater successfully pitched and co-produced *The Exorcist* for Morgan Creek, but while positioned in prime-time and made expensively for Fox, the show, I later acquiesce to my husband, is not good.

And nonetheless I want to defend it, especially because it has rolled out all the right cultural symbology in the series' mild sophomore-year reboot. For from this season, *The Exorcist* has clearly been transformed into a fully committed diversity project. Season 1, headlined by former action-film star, current TV performer, and longtime feminist-media researcher Geena Davis, had been set in the upper-middle-class world of wealthy white Chicago Catholics whose city congregation anxiously awaits a Papal visit.³ While more complex in its overall gendered landscape than it seemed on the surface—a minor story arc had featured the story world's female exorcists, Catholic Sisters who lovingly hugged the possessed bodies of victims into spiritual submission, suggesting that demon-expulsion protocols might be markedly gendered—the season's core iconography was that of two Catholic male Fathers, one a LatinX "star" priest (Thomas "Tomas" Ortega, played by Alfonso Herrera) whose Windy City work with poor congregations starts to take off, gaining

the Vatican's attention; and one a grizzled, bisexual, Church veteran (Marcus Keane, played by Ben Daniels) whose underground labor within that holy institution put him through decades of grueling rituals to rid humans of demons. Both men spent the season attacking vulnerable, distraught, disheveled women, often tying up and verbally and emotionally tormenting the bodies of violently straining, "possessed" white CIS-gender women and girls of privilege, trying to cleanse them of the devil.⁴ As a feminist, I watched the show's initial longform plot with a great deal of consternation, but hung in for the fact that the central arcs of the leading guest characters throughout the season involved teen and adult females in familial relationships with each other, however tortured, not romantically fighting or mooning over men in heteronormative ways. The season, despite its awful visual motifs, actually fulfilled media feminists' famous Bechdel test.⁵ However, in contrast with Season 1's mixed-to-terrible gender and class optics, usually played out within a tony townhouse where one daughter spent much of the season inhabited by evil spirits and thus chained down upon her bed in an increasingly dirty and chaotic room, Season 2 resets the location and mission of the twin exorcists, as well as the cultural politics of demonic victimhood. Viewing this season's opening episode, I marvel at the almost mechanical labors the writers and producers undertook towards including practically every imaginable type of narrative and onscreen (casting) diversity possible. The very story setup promises that they aimed for *The Exorcist* to become a how-to model for developing socially responsible storytelling in televisual-narrative production. Instead of the privileged, white, mostly straight, largely able-bodied, nuclear family in an expensive Chicago urban condominium, the exorcist partners now encounter a struggling foster family living in a house located in a rural island off the coast of Washington state.⁶ The household membership seems to one-up the multiracial LGBTQ foster family of *The Fosters* (2013-2018, on Freeform channel, formerly ABC Family)—a symbolically significant show where a middle-class, black-white, lesbian couple raises ethnically diverse foster kids from various troubled backgrounds—in terms of representing the very epitome of twenty-first-century US subalterns, making a similarly "meta" statement about the demographically rich "family" of humanity. *The Exorcist* Season 2 repositions the Catholic demon-scourging pair to aid a compassionate Asian American widower, Andy Kim (John Cho), who continues to take in foster children even after his own (white) depressed wife, who came up with this idea originally, tragically dies by her own hand; his equally child-loving, social-worker-associate-turned-girlfriend, Rose Cooper (for which the Asian

American Li Jun Li was color-blind cast); and the non-biologically related charges whom this couple parent together in an isolated, spooky, country house—a formerly abused, rebellious lesbian teen, Verity (Brianna Hildebrand); a cleancut African American male teen who’s a ghetto escapee cum religious practitioner aspirant, Shelby (Alex Barima); an agoraphobic and odd little girl, Grace (Beatrice Kitsos); a troubled blind boy, Caleb (Hunter Dillon); and a large, autistic tween, Truck (Cyrus Arnold). Based on this season’s new premise, the show itself seems possessed by the powerful digital forces of media “woke”ness of the 2010s—the vocal social hactivism of millennials, the super-effortful “social justice warrior”ing of post-Trump-election liberals, the deep humanist need to see ourselves as more politically conscientious than we may in fact be, in the wake of continued culture-war struggles splitting the nation ideologically. To me, the executive producers appear to have rolled the diversity dice big time, designing this elaborately “different” cast of characters into an easily exploitable story formula. But as a horror fan, I know the other part of the formula, the fantastic-genre conventions, honed over almost 300 years of storytelling, and begin to feel really sick.

As that episode unwinds, my scary-story-loving self knots my gut, aware of what’s coming. A lover of literary horror of the 1980s, ever since my favorite comic-book writer, Britain’s Alan Moore (*V for Vendetta*, *Watchmen*, *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*), the most critically acclaimed superhero-genre innovator of the early graphic-novel era, referenced fellow Brit author Clive Barker in Moore’s trailblazing rural supernatural series, DC Comics’ *Swamp Thing*, I spent my early twenties hooked on Barker’s novels but especially adored his debut works, *Books of Blood* (1984-1985). This hexalogy of showy short-fiction collections—which Stephen King had notably praised, calling the Liverpoolian out-gay writer the next big thing in their field—fiercely claimed the horror genre, transgressively, for a new group of subjects. His tales featured women, LGBTQ community members, people of color, poor and working-class folk, and others traditionally excluded from that highly commercial fantastic genre, long known for its knee-jerk reactionary conservatism, for its demonization of monstrous “other/s” such as members of these oppressed communities, and for its rigid moral judgment, yet shamelessly hypocritical deployment, of the intensely sexual and affective. Despite their expansive evolution over the last two and a half centuries, continental Gothic narrative and artistic traditions—crossing the Atlantic to become the settler-colonial US weird fiction of Hawthorne, Irving, Poe, Lovecraft, and *Weird Tales*,

morphing in Western Europe to take on romantic (Shelley's *Frankenstein*), then progressively mass-medial and modern, qualities in Victorian horror (Stoker's *Dracula*); evolving in the twentieth century into sparsely plotted psychological horror tales set in solipsistic (sub/urban settings (Shirley Jackson, Ray Bradbury, Robert Bloch, Ira Levin, Richard Matheson) or sociologically detailed rural ones (e.g. Southern Gothic, New England Gothic)—offers those of us who savor these fright-laced conventions the most straightforward, the most predictable, of fantastic narrative journeys. Fantasy scholar Farah Mendlesohn saddles the rhetorical-genre dimension of these horror traditions with the label, “intrusion fantasy”:

The trajectory of the intrusion fantasy is straightforward: the world is ruptured by the intrusion, which disrupts normality and has to be negotiated with or defeated, sent back whence it came, or controlled. In a few cases the intrusion wins but there is always a return of some kind... As a rhetoric, the form appears to depend both on the naïveté of the protagonist and her awareness of the permeability of the world—a distrust of what is known in favor of what is sensed. (114-181)

In the intrusion fantasy, aka the gothic tradition of Western horror, in scenes of simple recursion through which the story world's tone of anxiety ratchets up each time the narrative circles back, such innocents must negotiate with the monstrous invader who disrupts what had once been their normal, stable lives. That recursive invasion becomes manifest in the genre's powerful sensorium which, as Mendlesohn states, is what drives the plot, rather than the characters' (and audience's) rational, cognitive knowledge: story is breathlessly advanced upon the primordial building blocks of touch, scent, sound, sight, taste, intuition. There will be, as my colleague, African American fiction writer and horror scholar Lynette James calls it, “the squish and squick” of horror's narrative conventions—blood, sex, death, sweat, pain, tears, fainting, skin, torture, screaming, and other thematic movements towards the corporeal. As a result of grasping these longtime narrative conventions, I originally sense, upon watching that first episode, that the new season has been set up as a gothic assembly line wherein these characters chosen for their social marginality—differently abled, young, impoverished, Asian, female, black, on-the-spectrum, big-bodied, personality-disordered, and gay—will be systematically served up as “diversity” courses on a twenty-first-century horror subject /victim buffet. Thereafter, I view the show with a cautionary wince, dreading the

inevitably problematic outcomes that might arise from a thematic-genre approach that exposes these already vulnerable kids to exploitative journeys of terror, trauma, and hysteria. When the particular episode my husband and I view furnishes community backstory suggesting that the foster-house demon may be the spirit of a dead white-male islander who one day unexpectedly slaughtered all his children, I realize exactly what the protagonist played by star John Cho is up for.

When my husband rejects the whole series based on a quick episode check-in, however, I rethink my initial caution. He's rarely one to dismiss an audio-visual text outright due to distasteful extremism of content or politically offensive thematics, but rather mostly turns away in response to artistic-formal weakness—i.e. bad cinematic storytelling. The episode my husband and I try to watch together, "There for the Grace of God, Go I," where after four previous episodes of tension build-up, the demon finally makes its presence known to this large cast of characters, is a case in point of how poorly the series' televisual narrative has been put together.⁷ After viewers realize that the seemingly nice Andy, whom they suddenly learn had actually been driven mad by his wife's passing, has been completely hallucinating the never-born Grace, who—like the ghost of his dead spouse who will soon materialize as the demon's main vessel—reveals herself as a sinister tool of the manipulative family-killing spirit, we get a sequence of two-character dramatic interchanges providing a flurry of nugget-like backstories.

The first is between Father Marcus, the middle-aged, working-class, longtime Church exorcist, and the quietly masculine proprietor of one of the island's boats, the ruggedly handsome, salt-and-pepper-bearded, Peter Marlow (Christopher Cousins). Alone at night on Peter's vessel, the men, who earlier struck up a light, if sexually tense, friendship, trade biographical information on the deck overlooking the placid, moonlit waters:

MARCUS: How're you doing?

PETER: Well, you're the ex-priest who's looking for something he's lost, right?

You strike me as the sort of person who's not exactly comfortable sitting quietly with his own thoughts. And I was the same way. I did two tours in Kosovo, came back (laughs bitterly). Felt like my brain was on fire, like I wanted to rip off my

skin.

MARCUS: Like you'll never be still.

PETER: Yeah ... yeah. There was a kid in the rubble. We were, uh, clearing out this neighborhood in Urosivic. It was all bombed to hell, and I was scrambling up this embankment. And I put my hand down and there was something soft. And I looked down...(long pause) I saw that kid every day for the next two years. Every morning, I'd wake up; he'd be looking down at me. What about you, Marcus? What do you see?

MARCUS: Do you want to know what's in my head? Arguing. Mum and Dad barking at each other like dogs, both of them drunk. He's swinging a hammer; she's in a ball on the floor trying to scoop her brains back in with both her hands. I'm yelling at him to stop, and he cracks her again. (Breathes heavily) Now there's blood coming out of her like a fountain, and I'm seven years old. I pull his poaching rifle off the back of the door, and I shoot a bullet right in the middle of his throat, and even as he's going down, his big, bloody hands are trying to squeeze the life out of me. That's for starters.

Marcus proceeds to sum up past memories of traumatized children and families encountered through his exorcist work, each a brief narrative jewel of pain contained in 2-3 equally elegantly crafted sentences, including events from Season 1. "That is what I see when I close my eyes," he dramatically winds down the monologue, as the men gaze at each other in the moonlight in quiet empathy and pity, a perfect setup for the prolonged kiss that a follow-up scene delivers.

This moment is intercut with a simultaneous dialog sequence, set that same night in the island's forest, in which the foster kids—plus a recent addition to their family, domestic abuse survivor Harper (Beatrice Kitsos), whose maniacal mother, under the delusion that her daughter was satanically possessed, had tied up and malnourished the little girl in their home, before Fathers Tomas and Marcus eventually freed her—sit around a crackling bonfire and conversationally bond in pairs. The oldest, teens Verity and Shelby—snarky white-goth girl

and calm bible-quoting black youth—evaluate the two exorcists' intentions and religion in general, in the process revealing their personal histories in neatly quick exchanges. Verity expresses suspicion about the priests' motivations but Shelby defends them:

SHELBY: You know, V, some people actually just want to help other people.

VERITY: Like the counselors at my camp? They couldn't wait to help me pray the gay away. That's why they strapped me to a bed, sprayed me with freezing water, told me I was an abomination in the eyes of your "awesome" god: to "help."

When Caleb apologizes, explaining that such religious practitioners are "misguided," Verity reacts angrily until he corrects himself. "Not misguided—evil. But they didn't work for God; they work for the other guy," he patly explains. As the gay skeptic scoffs in response, the narrative opens up the African Christian's expository turn at an "origin" story:

SHELBY: I know more than you think. I was 2.4 pounds when I was born. Methadone all in my system. It was my first birthday present from my mom. And right now, everyone—every one of my brothers and sisters—is dead, except me. Because I found something to hold onto. I mean, we all got parents that mess us up, but God isn't one of them. He knows you're perfect, because that's the way he made you.

Even though these two character exchanges make the screenwriting professor in me want to weep big bold tears of disappointment and disgust because of their by-the-numbers exposition, painfully artificial dialog ("...[Y]ou're the ex-priest who's looking for something he's lost, right?") and unnatural transitional thematic cues ("... Like the counselors at my camp?").]—and even though their workmanlike, "infodump"-y nature demonstrates both laziness on the part of individual writers and poor management of the writing team's efforts, I still want very much to like this show. I want to keep defending it to my ferociously formally oriented husband, because I value the political imaginary behind the story universe that Jeremy Slater and his more experienced team of co-showrunners have set up. I like the way that the current star, the center of the show's season-long arc, is no longer

Geena Davis, a seasoned Hollywood insider. Instead, the season stars "outsider" John Cho, a much-admired 1.5-generation Korean immigrant actor.

I want to like it because Cho's critically embraced but ratings-challenged last series, the single-camera comedy *Selfie* (2014), historically the first scripted TV show ever to feature an Asian American male protagonist in a romantic comedy, had recently been humiliated by a very disrespectful cancellation practice by its network ABC (Saraiya). During a dearth of quality rom-com shows, the Pygmalion-lite *Selfie* drew praise from media critics of color and progressive TV reviewers for pairing versatile performer Cho with romantic partner Karen Gillan, as Cho played a polite but stuffy "Henry Higgins" teaching Gillan's millennial "Eliza Doolittle" social and humanistic manners in the very rude and narcissistic digital age.⁸ Like its writing-directing team of Danny Leiner, Jon Hurwitz, Hayden Schlossberg, and Todd Strauss-Schulson that developed white-ally movie trilogy *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle* (2004), *Harold and Kumar Escape From Guantanamo Bay* (2008), and *A Very Harold and Kumar 3D Christmas* (2011) which humanized Asian American men by comically conceptualizing Cho's Harold and Indian American actor Kal Penn's Kumar as wound-up professionals who also happened to be dedicated stoners, *Selfie* represented white-ally audio-visual narrative artistry at its most entertaining. Despite the efforts of fabulously fun (white) feminist Emily Kapnek, a showrunner known for televisual inventiveness and a light but original voice, and who was well-known as well for diversity casting practices that tended to include many Asians among her central dramatis personae, the show was not only canceled halfway through its relatively short, 13-episode run. But at first, the network also halted broadcasting new shows at episode 7, not even honoring the series with the dignity of airing the remainder of the season. This treatment, normally reserved for critically hated or offensively controversial shows rather than this well-reviewed critical darling was finally halted when feminist journalists and Asian American fans rallied in an Internet protest, the #StarringJohnCho hashtag trend created by Asian American digital strategist William Yu and replicated by feminist entertainment journalists and other media allies who had wanted the sexy, skilled performer to receive his due as a leading man. Even then, ABC only proffered the 6 leftover episodes on its streaming site, not prime-time TV where *Selfie* had been airing. This combination of a rare female showrunner in the very white-male producing world of prime-time comedy, and a romantic leading man who was Asian American had been a well-observed test of broadcast TV's multiple glass ceilings.

In the wake of *Selfie*'s demise and other social-media activism such as #OscarsSoWhite, #StarringJohnCho began a mid-2010s mini-media-representation movement by movie and TV industry journalist advocates of Asian American and other people of color performers, aimed at diversifying story content of scripted films/television and lessening the "whitewashing" of starring roles. This movement included parallel efforts in social and digital activism such as #StarringConstanceWu which centered around the imaginary casting of Constance Wu, talented and charming Chinese American co-lead of the Taiwanese American single-camera comedy *Fresh Off the Boat* (Cheng). Along with other contemporary efforts by ABC, *Fresh Off the Boat* (2015-present) symbolized the network's poorly executed 2010s move towards prime-time ethnic sitcoms, the majority of which it typically stopped broadcasting within a half-year to a year. These included the still-running, wildly popular African American sitcom-dramedy blend *'black-ish* (2014-present); the quickly canceled single-camera comedy *Cristela*, the first US sitcom headlined by a Latina character (2014-2015; also mentioned in Chapter 1); and the capable Korean American family sitcom *Dr. Ken* (2015-2017), which I'm convinced only won its brief two-season run due to creator-star Ken Jeong's informally belonging to powerhouse Jewish film/TV producer Judd Apatow's cinematic comedy troupe.⁹ Like founder Wu, media activists joining the #StarringConstanceWu and #StarringJohnCho trend photoshopped the faces of (Constance) Wu and Cho into famous movie posters of comedies, dramas, and action movies that had starred white performers, in response to recent examples of infamous whitewashed casting of originally Asian characters by Hollywood studios, including Tilda Swinton as the Orientalized Ancient One in Marvel's supernatural superhero *Doctor Strange* film (2016), Scarlett Johansson as the originally Japanese heroine of the US adaptation of sf-anime classic *The Ghost in the Shell* (2017), and Emma Stone as a Chinese-Hawaiian pilot in Cameron Crowe's space-themed movie dramedy *Aloha* (2015). While well-noted by the media and online communities of color in such famous films, this whitewashing story development and casting practice quietly continues in Peak TV "quality" cable-show premises. Showtime network's critically beloved financial drama *Billions* (2016-present), for example, is based loosely on the true-life, Robin-Hood-like exploits of Preetinder Singh Bharara, former US Attorney for the Southern District of New York, who was born a Sikh-Hindu 1.5-generation Punjabi immigrant from India and made his reputation by prosecuting corporate and upper-class criminals on Wall Street. Yet in the series development process

governed by its triad of white-male showrunners Brian Koppelman, David Levien, and Andrew Ross Sorkin, Bharara got turned into the privileged (but liberal) upper-class WASP character Chuck Rhoades, Jr., and the role went to Italian American Paul Giamatti.

John Cho followed in the “one for them, one for me” model of his friend and former director Justin Lin. The Taiwanese American producer and filmmaker had single-handedly revived Universal Studios' *The Fast and the Furious* films from a modestly budgeted, urban-car-race series into a global-blockbuster action franchise, while maintaining the earlier films' aggressively multiracial casting practice. But Lin also continued with creating small indie, Asian American, and Asian films, at the same time. Lin's casting of Cho in a key role in his widely recognized debut film *Better Luck Tomorrow* (2002) helped spark Cho's rise from independent-cinema and comedic character actor to mainstream performer in high-profile movie roles like the rebooted *Star Trek* series' iconic Hikaru Sulu (2009). Like Lin, whose career path alternated between huge mainstream hits (the F&F movies, *Star Trek: Beyond*) and smaller Asian- or Asian American-themed films (*Finishing the Game*, *Hollywood Adventures*), Cho strove throughout his work history to select either complex and/or positive “ethnic” TV and film projects, or mainstream projects that would, if populated by performers of color via color-blind casting, expand, enrich, and layer the levels of meaning in these audiovisual texts. “I experienced racism,” Cho told one journalist, “and in my professional life, I try to take roles (and have always tried to take roles) that don't fall within the parameters of any Asian stereotype” (Rogers).

So I want to root for this mediocre prime-time horror series, as I note how Cho marshals over a decade and a half of performance skills throughout this episode as he depicts the spiritually wracked Andy, trying to fight off his imaginary daughter's intrusion into his life and those of his very real foster kids—even if the tired, stock lines spoken by the now-creepy Grace and Andy thud in my writer's ears. Just as I want to support the rest of Slater's cast when made to deliver his teleplay writers' screechingly unoriginal dialog—for instance, the three performers appearing in the episode's expensively produced set piece meant to portray the Church's secret catacomb-like safe-house in Antwerp, Belgium. There, two of Tomas and Marcus' exorcist colleagues, the Church Mouse aka “Mouse” (Burmese-Indian-Malay-Iranian-European actress Zuleikha Robinson), who functions as the “Buffy” of this storyverse, a spunky, kick-ass female assassin specializing in killing demons, and Father Devon Bennett (Cameroon actor Kurt Egyiawan) the special security liaison of the Vatican

who schemes from within that rigid institution to protect the protagonist priests, finish off a possessed LatinX nun, Dolores Navarro (played by white performer Karin Konoval). The two exorcists of color urgently need to flee this dungeon-like setting to save the lives of innocent people, so Mouse tests Bennett about his will to put the needs of the many over the life of the brutally bound Sister Dolores, whose spirit, she insists, is gone for good. Mouse insists to Bennett that the most merciful action would be to murder the nun, since, "She's already integrated (with the demon) ... So would you rather set her loose on the streets or leave her here to starve like a chained-up dog?" When he initially demurs, in speculation that Dolores might still overcome her possession, just as a character in an earlier story arc did, Mouse emphasizes again the urgency of the situation. "I need to know that when the time comes, you're capable of doing what needs to be done," the assassin asserts, taking out a tool that resembles surgical scissors with an attached hypodermic needle from her kit, filling the tube with holy water, then passing it to him. At this point, the script disingenuously concludes this fast and stale bit of character-conflict with more perfunctory plotting. To motivate her swift murder and the scene's immediate exit, the show's scripters make Sister Dolores whine to Bennett that she still remains inside her stricken body and desires his aid and salvation, but when he responds that innocent people might suffer if he spends more time with her or lets her go, her answer causes his expression to turn fierce. This is because the writers make Dolores implore that Bennett prioritize saving her soul over those of the innocents, allowing the clergyman to pronounce, triumphantly, that "The real Dolores would never put herself before others!" before he stabs her with Mouse's scissors then presses the holy-water syringe deep into her chest. As I view the body of this middle-aged female character receive that blow, followed by its torso then whole form sequentially bursting into flame (because demon+holy water=sacred fire) and falling dead upon the cobblestones, the shot bookended by the standing forms of the two performers of color who have swiftly moved out of the way, I shake my head at this contrived "Ha, gotcha, Satan!" sequence. As a horror fan, I'm disturbed by the dispassionate, disingenuous depiction of violence, cleanly and clinically executed in a way that doesn't even dirty the clothes of the surviving demon-fighters. I think, "But I don't want to see the Asian-Arab girl and the black man stab and immolate the LatinX woman, especially over such a stupid plot point, especially so mechanically. This is NOT what we're fighting for."

And I know, on at least some levels, that it does matter, poorly executed or not,

that Slater's team deliberately constructs the romance between Andy and Rose, two Asian American characters, as the central co-parenting dynamic that morally guides all the season's guest characters. The "traditional" white-showrunner's way of diversity-plotting in scripted TV, up until this decade, would have been to make the promising-future-spouse girlfriend white and the dead demonic wife (Nikki, played by an eerie Alicia Witt) a woman of color. Through the 1990s and early 2000s, in scripted series, the normative female partner in a heterosexual relationship with a(n inevitably white-)male protagonist was always white, while the threatening rival consistently presented as, if not white, a woman of color, a non-American foreigner, or both.¹⁰ So it's not a small thing, to watch a mainstream US prime-time dramatic series that for a full season focuses upon two people of color seemingly from the same cultural background in a loving relationship, put under threat in ways that make the audience care that they survive, as they try to protect and raise a family, especially one as blended and diverse as this one. Especially I want to keep watching when Slater, in science-fiction specialty blogs, defends that episode's intensely romantic kiss between the aging Catholic priest Marcus and US military veteran Peter against Twitter homophobes, to whom his immature but essentially ethical message is:

Good, fuck you. I'm glad you didn't like it, I'm glad it ruined the show for you. You shouldn't have good things in your life.

If a homophobe can't watch the show anymore because one of the characters is gay, then I'm glad something good has come out of it. (*Sci-Fi Bulletin*, qtd. in Glass)

I want to defend the series with its spunky liberal showrunner, but no. This is not the fight I signed up for—I am not interested in evaluating mediocre work by privileged white men, however sweetly they try to leap onto the diversity bandwagon, which has become a proven Hollywood business trend since Lin's multiculturally cast F&F movies became successive box office hits from the mid-2010s onward, and has been manifested in television through network “ethnic” comedies created and produced by people of color such as Fox's (then Hulu's) *The Mindy Project* (2012-2017, starring Indian American comedienne Mindy Kaling), NBC's *Telenovela* (2015-2016, with a mostly LatinX cast headed by star Eva Longoria), Netflix's *Master of None* (2015-present, a fictionalized dramedic version of Indian

American standup performer Aziz Ansari's life), *The Carmichael Show* (2015-2017, with an all-black cast headed by comedian Jerrod Carmichael), and CBS's *Rob* (2012, about a white man played by FilipinX comedian Rob Schneider marrying into a LatinX family). I am interested instead in mediocre to excellent televisual work by people of color, women, LGBTQ people, etc.—“mediocre,” because a certain degree of artistic messiness is to be expected from such creative artists, as racism, sexism, homophobia, etc., play out in the cultural politics of production and frequently get in the way of these artists' formal execution of televisual narrative. I am not here to fight for Jeremy Slater, even if he evinces the occasional glimmer of sophistication at genre storytelling (for instance, I like the planned plot twist at the season's start, when he and his team set up Harper's arc with the two priests, so that we think she actually is possessed, only to reveal later that no, it's her mentally ill mother's paranoia and abuse that has kept the girl imprisoned, and Tomas and Marcus must gradually figure this out). But in terms of execution, from an audience perspective, we go through those scenes of monstrous maternalism with the same rote pacing and clinical infodumping as the other trite sequences I've just described. In this shallow gothic journey, the domestic abuse feels like just another subplot that serves mainly to stay the twin exorcists from reaching Andy's house until partway through the season when they'll begin their real narrative work. So I am not holding up Slater's writing and producing as worthy, even if he's obviously leaned towards cultural inclusivity in writing and casting practice, nor am I expressing consternation about the fact that his "diverse" show has been canceled. Jeremy Slater, as feminist news blogger Lainey Lui says about privileged white-male film and TV artists who experience occasional career failures in Hollywood on their way to accessing more unequally raced, gendered, and classed workplace opportunities within an institutional structure that systematically benefits them over others, will be fine.¹¹

Though for the second half of this chapter, I will discuss the excellent artistry of some US white-male writer-producers, showrunners who exceed the perfunctory average that the industry allows their relatively highly educated and formally credentialized (usually with MFAs at the minimum, a classist, upper-middle-class gatekeeping requirement for WGA-level writers) demographic, at the same time, I remind myself that these same institutional mechanisms prematurely cancel female-and-people-of-color-produced shows such as *Selfie* or banish similarly minority-or-women-run series like the soon-to-be-dead *Fresh Off the Boat*, created and managed by Iranian American comedy showrunner and my fellow

Hawai'i-raised homegirl Nahnatchka Khan (*Don't Trust the B---- in Apartment 23*), to the notorious "Friday night death slot," where shows are infamously sent to die from poor ratings.¹² I need to remember that these white-male writers that I have long admired happen to be considered "horror" auteurs, but the label results from the uneven distribution of explicitly genred labor among audio-visual narrative artists within the occupational structures of creative industry in global capitalism. Shonda Rhimes, for instance, despite her outstanding business accomplishments in dominating all of ABC's treasured Thursday night prime-time lineup and transforming it into her "TGIT" block of roller-coaster-like narrative programming aimed at professional women and people of color, will never be regarded a "horror" auteur, despite the fact that the black showrunning businesswoman has crafted or supervised the writing of some of the most memorably cinematic, emotionally dark, exquisitely tense, viscerally corporeal moments—for instance, of appallingly precise, but also humanistic, portrayals of violence and its outcomes—that I've seen on Peak TV over the past fifteen years. Shonda Rhimes, former hospital Candy Striper and fervent lover/generator of medical shows (producing *Off The Map* where Hawai'i stands in for Latin America, which I will address in the next chapter, in addition to *Grey's Anatomy* which I analyzed briefly in Chapter 1, and *Private Practice*, which I will proceed to discuss below), lifelong student of the human body's many ways of telling us stories, has unsurprisingly mastered the narrative potential of the horror sensorium and in fact taken the multi-century gothic tradition back to school at our TV academy.

Consider, for instance, her powerful multi-episode arc of the sexual assault and trauma recovery of female doctor and series regular Charlotte King (KaDee Strickland) by a mentally ill patient, in the now-defunct *Grey's* spin-off medical drama *Private Practice* (2007-2013). "Did You Hear What Happened to Charlotte King" starts with a horrifying and very non-eroticized portrayal of rape, using camera, edits, and other *mise-en-scene* elements to put the viewers right there in the scene of the crime, unable to look away, even as it tries not to put that moment's narrative together in exploitative, explicit, or overly sexualized ways. Most of the show's tense running time then explores the shattering psychological aftermath for survivor Charlotte, her doctor fiancé, and their coworkers as victims of secondary violence. The episode was scripted personally by Rhimes and collaborated upon with the Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network (RAINN), just as she and that show's writers would later partner up with RAINN to present the first episode on network dramatic TV to feature the

outcomes of male-male sex assault in the US military (RAINN).¹³ As a “straight” drama, *Private Practice*, compared to the more dramedic and frequently rom-com light progenitor show *Grey’s* which shares the same storyverse, allows for such scenes, because the formal-artistic and thematic language of the former tends towards very drawn-out and visceral exploration of darker content in dark ways, while *Grey’s* storytelling rhythms typically explore difficult content in hopeful ways. Horror arises as a distinct tone, if not an identifiable and isolatable narrative mode, throughout the series.

This is a structural preference set at the showrunning and executive-producing level that works its way down into the writer’s room, longer multi-episode story arcs, and individual scripts. For example, the character Dr. Amelia Shepherd (Caterina Scorsone), who has appeared in both PP and its progenitor show, tended to go through more intensely portrayed, extremely executed bodily experiences in *Private Practice* (e.g. in Season 5: participating in an orgy of drug abuse leading to her hookup and doping partner dying in their bed followed by her later giving birth to their anencephalic fetus which she deliberately carries to term so as to donate its organs to needy patients after it naturally and quickly dies) than in *Grey’s* (e.g. Season 14: discovering she had a brain tumor then getting operated upon successfully, which leads to the friendly if comedic break-up of her marriage, because that mate selection and most of her past actions had been the tumor’s decisions, not hers). While both shows foreground the corporeal, *Private Practice* draws upon the narrative sensorium and logic of horror, delving into the body’s journey into pain, discomfort, fear, and other unpleasant affects via classic gothic rhythms; whereas *Grey’s* vision is that of doctors performing professional work upon human bodies, in scenes more traditionally detached from the continuous sensations experienced by those medical subjects themselves, which we viewers witness with a fair amount of objectivity, administered with a distance achieved through conventionally dramatic or comedic beats.

As a horror fan and writer, I have been impressed by how Rhimes uses her practiced grasp on the genre to deepen, layer, and stimulate the pragmatic-rhetorical effects upon viewers of other narrative conventions. Take, for instance, another much-talked-about scene of extreme horror her writers room came up with for Shondaland production company’s gonzo-violence-themed (torture, assassination, kidnapping, imprisonment, mass murder, etc.) series *Scandal* (2012-2018)—a political drama for which Rhimes supervised the plotting and scripting very closely, considering it one of her personal TV babies among the

many she produced. This shocking, reprehensible moment involves Maya (malevolently played by Khandi Alexander), the sociopathic terrorist mother of African American “DC fixer” protagonist Olivia Pope, chewing through the flesh of her own wrists, in order to avoid the Machiavellian manipulations of the arguably more evil spy ex-husband who imprisons her, a bravura episode and terrifying gross-out scene directed by black female movie and television showrunning auteur Ava DuVernay who made the films *Selma* and *A Wrinkle in Time* and TV’s *Queen Sugar*.¹⁴ While Rhimes clearly uses these horror-mode narrative skills to sharpen her overall brand and sustain the solid ratings of her darker-themed series from episode to episode, when she writes or produces these undeniably chilling television moments, she sometimes receives criticisms for depicting “unlikable” characters (to which she has replied, “...No one says about *Game of Thrones*, ‘Oh, well, now, I don’t like this person,’” pointing to the more critically beloved, more explicitly violent, white-male showrun and created, dark-fantasy-labeled show).¹⁵

However, while squeamishly criticizing such episodes for their (alleged) audience trauma, the same reviews do not tend to highlight how the complex use of genre in her narrative artistry makes such an impact possible—how her particularly odd tonal mix of medical drama, feminist/female soap opera, crime thriller, and horror in PP kept the relatively minor Shondaland show in the news and gave it an unexpectedly long run of six years. With *Scandal* and her other inventively cinematic series *How to Get Away With Murder*, Rhimes sifts horror into riveting remixes of traditional genre forms (political drama and spy thriller for *Scandal*; courtroom drama and crime thriller for HTGAWM) to create new televisual modes of storytelling for her predominantly female, LGBTQ, and people of color protagonists, thus challenging institutionalized genre practices on multiple levels. Whether crafting socially conscious, community-oriented and –collaborative work such as the two sex assault-themed episodes of *Private Practice*, or trashy escapist violence and “OMG!”-level ratings-luring scares in *Scandal*, Rhimes ups the narrative stakes from conventional ways to handle genre in her writing-trade work, depicting effective and original horror sequences.

Unlike Jeremy Slater, she will never write stock scripts in which women are kidnapped and caged by admiring male strangers who play punk-ass verbal mindgames with them until they escape through very clichéd tactics (see his script for *Pet*). In Rhimes’ televisual imaginary, such as *Scandal*’s notorious “YOLO” episode, when women are kidnapped, imprisoned, and tortured, it is by male colleagues whom they consider family,

because—as wet worker aka Special-Ops-level-dirty-work spy Huck (Guillermo Diaz) tells frightened hacker protégée Quinn (Katie Lowes) before he licks her face, straddles her shackled form, and wrenches out one of her teeth with a plier—this close situation makes the violence all the more disturbing: “I’ve never done this with somebody in the family, with somebody I love,” Huck admits.¹⁶ The discomfiting but original Huck-Quinn torture scene becomes even more horrific when we realize this isn’t the worst thing either of them have done in the show, as we come to accept *Scandal*’s long-arc narrative assertion that within a year’s time, the two coworkers will return to intimate friendship and loyal collegiality, because the series’ core logic, in its alternative-history science fiction mode, is that of likable people performing awful actions to save Republican Presidents in a highly compromised US “Republic.”¹⁷ Here, horror has ceased its simple and spare gothic rhythms, to be replaced by a series-long Grand Guignol style both more formally sophisticated in terms of narrative structure and more reflective of the complex strata of contemporary state violence and its imperial networks of messed-up tortured and tortuous agents. In the warped world of *Scandal*, Rhimes has, in essence, taken the rhetorical positioning of Mendlesohn’s intrusion fantasy and expanded the intrusion until it interpenetrates the realm of everyday life, to the point where viewers imagine it as thoroughly inescapable.

Like genre-surfer Ridley, fiercely cinematic Tamahori, insistently political Kinjo, or polyvocally layered Kneubuhl, Rhimes certainly experiments with TV’s seemingly fixed genre modes as an economic survival practice, marking her as innovative, enriching her exchange value within the televisionary labor market, ameliorating the damage done by the industry’s racism- and sexism- slanted career ladders. But she also actively redefines and reinterprets commercial genres into feminist practice, into alternative modes of African American storytelling. Her subtly subversive small-screen moments aim to modify microtropes (e.g., if a white female performer is going to have her character’s bound body tormented by a character played by a man of color, better the uncomfortable Huck-Quinn sequence than the too-easily-dismissed Bennett-Dolores one). She thus lays the groundwork for culturally reconceptualizing and creolizing genres as expressive instruments in an artistic or thematic movement. What are the larger genre impacts of Rhimes’ storytelling innovations? Which generic discourses, generic genealogies, do her shows and scenes engage within the cultural field of TV narrative practice? *Scandal* might never be given its due within the growing televisual genealogy of millennial “horror” shows, which include not only high-profile prime-

time network series like *The Exorcist* and *Hannibal* and prestige-cable shows such as *True Blood*, but also basic-cable offerings such as *Bates Motel*, *Damien*, and *Beowulf*, which except for SyFy's *Superstition* are not executive-produced, created, or showrun by people of color.¹⁸ Horror TV, like science fiction and fantasy television, remains largely the domain of white-male showrunners.¹⁹ But I suspect Rhimes' audacious narrative experiments may contribute to the genrefication of scripted series about US Presidential- and Congressional-level politics, morphing representations of our electoral process towards a more critical and skeptical vein than those of the past. Like *The West Wing* (NBC, 1999-2006), which romanticizes the leaders of the nation and other upper-class political bureaucrats that benefit from the two-party system, especially Democrats. *Scandal* can be paired superficially with the much more white-male-created and managed, much less diversity cast, *House of Cards* (Netflix, 2013-present; adapted from the 1990 BBC series), which presents similarly pessimistic views about the unethical intricacies of Beltway power. However, as *House of Cards* is executive-produced by white-male filmmaker David Fincher, who deploys "indie"-style cinematic motifs that encourage viewers to enjoy, with a nihilistic thrill of "rebellion," the heinous acts committed by powerful white-male and white-female politicians such as the Underwoods (Kevin Spacey and Robin Wright Penn), the series' narrative tends to portray them as ballsy antiheroes, making the audience complicit even as it hypocritically encourages them to view the actions with shock and judgment. Compared to *Scandal*, *House of Cards* frames such acts with considerably fewer moments of true horror and terror. By contrast, *Scandal*'s obvious contradictions comprising the show's main tensions—between its recurring network of character "patriots" who claim to protect "the Republic" on the one hand, and, on the other, the horrifically illegal, dehumanizing, and over-the-top violent actions they commit—does not allow for viewers to accept the ideologies underlying US empire in fully uncritical ways.

Beyond genrefication and genre genealogies, however, as a writer myself, I need to analyze further the dynamics of audience reception in order to fully understand the rhetorical and pragmatic dimension of these horror-genre creolizations. Because, as with all good things in industrial art, in creative industry, the explanation of Rhimes' strength as a writer-producer is not an obvious story. Using community reception to her advantage has always been one of her skill sets, one which has helped her ascend within the very non-diverse ranks of TV showrunning. From the start of her career, she utilized ABC's website to garner live responses by fans and even put her shows' stars, writers, and producers in that site to

“talk” with viewers during or immediately after episodic broadcasts. Along with the producers of *Pretty Little Liars*, she pioneered the use of live-tweeting and hashtags to promote Shondaland’s series. Today, her social-media presence as a founding member of the anti-sexual harassment, pro-diversity, #TimesUp movement, is far-reaching and powerful. Evaluating her strategies, media critics for the most part tend to view Shondaland’s productions as female- and diversity-audience-pandering popular TV, not artistic, “quality” shows or specialized genre series. Considered serial soap operas despite their other genre hybridization, these shows are rarely recognized in journalistic or academic books on “good” Third Golden Age TV. In the handful of times my husband has walked into our viewing room while I watch *Scandal*, however, he always sticks around and finishes that episode, even after my recurrent warnings in which I echo these evaluations: “It’s not about good people, they’re totally immoral and the politics are so bad, and the plot’s extremely ‘ridic.’ It’s such a stupid show, I’ve been meaning to quit from Season 1, but I can’t stop watching.” Deeply interested in invention and experimental form, he can’t stop taking it in once he starts, either. I know this is not only due to Rhimes’ capable writing and plotting skills that marshal my favorite of all the fabulist modes, Mendlesohn’s intrusion fantasy, but in how she interweaves that horror mode with other genres and then tests those genre-hybridizations through her production firm’s social-media and online fan response evaluation. Rhimes draws on the intrusion fantasy, but in invisible ways. Thus, if I only look at textual categories of storytelling (“horror show” v. “political drama”), accepting their capitalistic market labels as the be-all and end-all of genre definition, Shonda’s pragmatic and rhetorical expertise with the horror genre, her practical and mercantile testing of it in combination with other modes of story, would not be so visible. As I noted in Chapter 1, in discussing *Grey’s Anatomy* “ghost” and Disney fairy-tale intertextuality, Rhimes’ teleplays frequently contain the fantastic, but it’s a very surprising version of that kinship system that hides it, smuggles it into other, more broadly appealing and commercial story modes.

This realization about innovative TV genre, its clever quality of sneakiness and surprise, is something of note to a hopeful producer. From a mercantile perspective, if I wait for the conjuncture in which genrefication occurs, jumping upon a commercial genre once its formal-artistic, thematic, and rhetorical-pragmatic dimensions amalgamate into convention and institutionalization, I’ve already lost out on the best business openings. As an aspiring producer, pre-genrefication and non- or never-genrefied experimental practices

of fantastic storytelling are where I need to be: creating my own mixed-genre language, even the next wave of genre investigation and testing; assessing not the slow, inefficient, and reactive markets of big-media corporate capitalism, which jumps on commercial trends once they're obvious and genreified, but the community-based, raw consumer responses via social and digital media, much as Rhimes has always evaluated, via her twenty-first-century fourth-wave feminist media strategy.

SOME PLANS, SOME MODELS: TELEVISUAL HORROR AUTEURS AND THE SPIRITUAL ONTOLOGY OF THE NARRATIVE SENSORIUM

When I started this project, I was obsessed with the 1990s-2000s trend within fantastic literary communities that identified with specific narrative genealogies of labeling what members had considered startling, unexpected, non-conventional, or even troubling mixed-genre narrative tactics by recent writers working within these “families” of fabulist or speculative storytelling. Each community had been in the historical process of categorizing a newly genreified trend within their narrative lineage, a stage that film-genre theorist Altman calls substantification, a necessary, but neither sufficient nor linear, “labeling” step wherein these new genre trends move towards canonization (61-62). Altman views genres as developing initially from modalities—particular semantic (thematic), syntactic (formal-artistic), and pragmatic (rhetorical, functional) generic instantiations that creative-industry artists such as Rhimes might innovate, produce, then evaluate—and eventually, if repeated, some off these modes would rise in status and legitimacy through cycles of narrative practice within the larger cultural field of production, during which some new genres persist and replicate, while others die off, shedding symbolic power.

Within science fiction, I studied slipstream, a term proposed by cyberpunk author Bruce Sterling to start conversations with his peers in the highly institutionalized and discursive American speculative-fiction community, to analyze 1970s-1990s sf trends that represented authors' changing ways of handling the presentation of subjectivity and consciousness. Slipstream made readers “feel very strange” because their taletelling tactics violated longtime, recognizable sf narrative conventions (Kelly and Kessel). Within the (again largely white, albeit recently diversifying) feminist American sf-fantasy women's literary community, inheritors of the legacy of James Tiptree, Jr., active participants in WisCon and the Carl Brandon award—female producers of sf-fantasy—I studied interstitial fiction, marked by writers who creatively rejected standardized genre labels just as some anti-

war activists reject national(ist) identities, instead pulling from a variety of genre traditions. The "interstitial" in these mostly female writers' work, as global fantasy scholar Heinz Insu Fenkl explains, possesses a liminal quality, defying the pull of genre boundaries and category-making: it is "not on its way to becoming something else" (iv). I looked into the New Wave Fabulist literary movement, created by forward-thinking academic and publishing communities which were interested in crossings between global non-realist, surrealist, fabulist, magical realist, and experimental literary fiction with fantastic modes, forms, or themes, especially fiction written largely outside traditional publication venues for science fiction, fantasy, and horror communities. This micro-movement allied creative-writing scholars and specialists in international literature in translation with edgy academic and small presses, and included texts such as *The New Wave Fabulists* and *Paraspheres: Extending Beyond the Spheres of Literary and Genre Fiction*. Denying the dichotomies of the real versus the unreal based on Western empirical perspectives, New Wave Fabulism included decolonial efforts aimed at freeing the fantastic by denaturalizing Global North commercial definitions of fantastic genre and moving towards fantastic orientations and practices of the rest of the globe, tied to land, place, and a larger biopolitical world. Fantastic sensibilities are not set aside from so-called reality in these literary stories, since, as diasporic sf-fantasy author Nalo Hopkinson notes, the real-unreal division ought to be seen as a continuum. Outside the West, she says, people "have a different worldview. The irrational, the inexplicable, and the mysterious exist side by side with the daily events of life. ... Best instead to find ways to incorporate both the logical and the illogical into one's approach to the world" (xiii).

As a writer who plans to work within creative industry, I am, like Rhimes, fascinated by performing the labor of putting forth new genre modalities that can gain enough momentum for Altman's substantification, the "labeling" phase which he views as prior to canonization, because that level of generic stability can impact communities in struggle. Genre at that stage can become a "thing," a popular-cultural meme possessing some political momentum, and thus become useful to social movements and resistance practices, as well as becoming deployed progressively in corporate strategies including programming tactics. Though not (yet) considered canonical aka classic Peak TV like *The Sopranos*, *Breaking Bad*, or *Mad Men*, Rhimes' Shondaland shows have become a subgenre in themselves—genreified through her own clever media strategies, which have been aided by ABC's "#TGIT" branding design that unites her and other similarly feminist or woman-protagonist-led, series

such as *Quantico* into a mini-programming block that provides an easy and continuous destination for a powerful viewing demographic. In the past five years, the “block of women’s shows” label has been imitated by other networks, further proving its substantified status. Prime-time rival NBC attempted to make #WomanCrushWednesdays an evening thing, anchoring its block in *Law and Order: SVU* (a long-running feminist show about a police unit that specializes in sex assault and “special victims”) by pairing it with other female-protagonist-led series during the same night such as *The Mysteries of Laura*, and MTV in a parallel move attempted #TripleCrushTuesdays for its young-adult and teen audience, featuring the trio of girl-led shows focused on young female characters in female friendships or in sisterly or motherly relationships, *Awkward*, *Faking It*, and *Happyland*.

I am interested in evolving a certain not-yet-substantified subgenre of televisual horror into that stage of genrefication, to the point where it reaches a credibility status reflecting levels of community consciousness like those that slipstream has achieved within literary sf, gaining notice and definition from its genre-mixing power, word-of-mouth credibility, and originality. The particular subgenre is political horror, which has made a small comeback in the film world recently due to African American writer-director-performer Jordan Peele’s massive hit *Get Out* (2017), which together with less-known feminist horror offerings such as *A Girl Walks Alone Home At Night* (by Iranian American director Ana Lily Amirpour, 2014) and *The Babadook* (by Jennifer Kent, 2014), has made a dent in the overwhelming domination of millennial horror cinema by either Blumhouse-style high-concept haunted-house offerings (the *Paranormal Activity* and *Insidious* series), descendants of early-millennial torture porn and techno-horror (*The Purge* series, *The Last House on the Left* remake, *Sinister* series, *Unfriended*), or coldly nihilistic revivals of arty Carpenteresque 1970s horror forms (*It Follows*, *The Innkeepers*, *The Witch*). The political horror film, however, has not made as much significant progress in that media’s field of cultural production as has its televisual siblings, thanks largely to two major horror auteurs, Ryan Murphy and John Logan, who imported the sensibilities of the subversive New Weird, the most salient fantastic-literary movement of the 1990s-2000s. In taking apart the genre tactics of Murphy and Logan, I will discuss the New Weird genre movement and its televisual manifestations, especially in terms of how it deploys transgressive horror within the gothic imaginary to speak back to Western horror’s historical marginalities and prejudices.

I am interested in Frow's notion of the world-building quality of genre: how genre constitutes "ontological domains" which result in "effects of reality and truth" (19). According to Marxist historian of the gothic José B. Monleón, the ontology of the gothic, and the political order it supported, originated in the world of Enlightenment Europe as it experienced modernity, capitalism, and imperialism from the mid-eighteenth through the twentieth century. The gothic evolved from an "ideological and historical framework" of cultural beliefs among the European bourgeoisie that reflected their "sociopsychological problem" over "uncertainty about or questioning of the nature of some events" (18). Specifically, Monleón points to events that frightened the bourgeoisie by demonstrating the collective power of the working and lower classes who were protesting or finding ways to resist rapid, often dehumanizing social and institutional changes in the criminal justice system, the city, the economy, and the state. Contextualizing representations of the gothic "other" within this wide milieu that included proletarian struggles such as the French Revolution, the 1848 uprisings, and the Bolshevik Revolution, Monleón discusses the mediating function of this fantastic genre within these dialectics of history. While the reader of these proto-horror texts seemed rhetorically placed to identify with outcast characters representing romanticism within the Age of Reason, the gothic also positioned that reader against the working and lower classes, who were associated with monstrous unreason in opposition to the gothic's romantic heroes (20). Monleón's scholarship, to me, provides the sociohistorical context behind horror's conservative bent.

This European horror tradition, with its powerful narrative sensorium, historically has allowed authors of texts to create a visceral political story world with strong moral, ethical, and spiritual structures of implication. What showrunners like Ryan Murphy and John Logan have done with this essentially reactionary story world of the gothic is to infuse their televisual versions of it with New Weird sensibilities that transform the core ontological frameworks of storytelling without losing the sensorium or its deeply affective structures of implication. The New Weird movement of the 1990s through 2000s, which represented writers, critics, and readers in American and British transgressive horror and in the more surrealist traditions of the gothic, claimed a literary genealogy reaching back to Romantic, Symbolist, and Decadent texts (VanderMeer xvi), and including subversive "dark" fantasy or sword-and-sorcery narratives, boundary-pushing sociopolitical urban fantasy, postmodern fairy tales, and other tricky combinations of folklore, avant-garde art and storytelling, and

literature. Largely made up of liberal to progressive white men and women, the New Weird's community tended to enjoy experimentations with the horror genre, finding new ways to subjectify and empathize with the monstrous supernatural and to explore how the modern consciousness engages spirituality, terror, dream, and desire. Though M. John Harrison and China Mieville are seen as authors typifying this movement, Clive Barker is widely viewed as a progenitor auteur and patron saint, with his fiercely queer, pro-female, and insistently subaltern approaches to turning gothic horror ideologically on its head to serve the marginalized.

Ryan Murphy, son of a white Indianapolis suburban housewife who had worked in communications prior to her very 1950s era retirement into heteronormative domesticity and her husband, a newspaper circulation director, grew up class-privileged but enraged at the social inequality faced by himself and other LGBTQ community members. Like me, he was substantially influenced by Barker's trendsetting approach to transgressive horror; unlike me, he benefited from a direct lineage with Barker, having in his youth partnered romantically with horror and fantasy cinematic auteur Bill Condon (*Gods and Monsters*, the last two *Twilight* films, Disney's live-action *Beauty and the Beast*), who mentored him just as Barker had earlier mentored Condon during their production of *Candyman (II): Farewell to the Flesh* (1995, directed by Condon), a film adaptation of Barker's short story about an urban-folkloric black supernatural antihero with roots in the US slavery era, inspired in part by Barker's longtime partnership with African American photographer David Emilian Armstrong. The media genealogy of queer horror expression from which Murphy descends crosses the Atlantic back and forth in an almost postmodern self-consciousness. The British Barker, in urban-fantasy novel *Coldheart Canyon: A Hollywood Ghost Story* (2001), traces the lineage of gay male directors contributing to Hollywood history through the layered queer subtext of films produced from these auteurs' closeted positions. Condon includes a scene making a similar self-reflective nod to queer media history in *Gods and Monsters* (1998) where gay director George Cukor and lesbian actress Elsa Manchester greet gay horror auteur James Whale, Condon's protagonist, at an industry party. Pairing his familial career grasp of communications media with genre knowledge gleaned from individual and community LGBTQ genealogies of horror, Murphy came to Hollywood with a New Weird, transgressive-gothic agenda. His love for the genre is not only reflected within discrete, horror-dedicated series and episodes (*American Horror Story* TV franchise, *Scream Queens*), but

also, like Rhimes, he deploys neogothic modalities within other televisual genre mixes such as crime/biopic (*American Crime Story* TV franchise), romantic comedy/musical (*Glee*), medical thriller/crime (*Nip/Tuck*), and of course, following both Barker and Condon, queer history (the upcoming *Pose*) and Hollywood history (the *Feud* TV franchise's *Bette and Joan*). For example, compared to Shondaland's new series about first responders (especially fire fighters and cops), *Station 19* (2018-present, ABC), which focuses on the science, technology, and economics of first-responder work, Murphy's superficially similar *9-1-1* (2018-present, Fox) foregrounds the spiritual, deviant-emotional, and sometimes supernaturally weird aspects of this first-responder labor. In an early episode, when newbie fire fighter Buck (Oliver Stark) talks with his experienced coworkers and dropping-by cop Athena (Angela Bassett) at the station about his first loss, a man he tried to save hanging from seat of a mis-operating roller coaster who falls to his death, he is exposed to the story world's genre logic:

ATHENA: You know why they make us wear these uniforms, right? Cops, firefighters, paramedics.

(Another firefighter guesses: "Sex appeal.")

BUCK: So people can easily identify us.

ATHENA: Both true. But it's also for our own good. Because when we take the uniform off at the end of the day, it symbolizes a letting go—of all the sad, crazy, and inhumane things we've seen that day.²⁰

On the Shondland production, cops and firefighters also develop empathetic relationships in processing trauma, but the nature of their labor fundamentally and philosophically as death work is not emphasized by the black female TV auteur nor her lieutenants who run *Station 19*. *Station 19*'s characters process their occupational problems in practical ways: they train with team members to get over fear of fire (in the case of the traumatized female fire fighter Vic, played by Barrett Doss) and closely interact as friends to lend emotional support to each other (as do the show's lead Andy, potential future station captain played by Jaina Lee Ortiz, and her best friend and coworker Maya, played by Danielle Savre). However, the ontology of

the show's story world is essentially a secular and pragmatic one, not informed by a deep spiritual view of death. In contrast, Murphy's *9-1-1* presents an ontological storyverse in which the nature of death work becomes a major theme. Death work, according to criminal justice scholar Vincent E. Henry in his monograph on law-enforcement labor, *Death Work: Police, Trauma, and the Psychology of Survival*, involves not just the officially required work of occupations that mandate regular contact with the possibility of death, such as cops, medical professionals, and military workers, but also the related "psychological struggles and transformations ... experience(d) as a result of their routine work-related exposures to the deaths of others, as well as more profound and personally consequential encounters with their own mortality" (3). The exchange between Athena and Buck is from an episode entitled "Let Go," which drives home the notion that many things are out of the hands of first responders as death workers, who will witness bizarre and inexplicable, as well as philosophically crazy-making, encounters with the mortality of others as well as their own. Thus, in Murphy's writing room, episodes are designed and developed to emphasize those aspects of first-responder labor. For example, another episode, "Full Moon (Creepy AF)" features the deviant, criminal, and downright offensive behavior of various denizens of LA, actions which first responders are called in to assist, regulate, and mitigate, in both humorous and dramatic beats, when the moon is full.²¹ In "Karma's a Bitch," the first responders witness how the unethical or unlawful behavior by various Angelenos in the past has been followed by causally unconnected, but spiritually consequential (if ironic) outcomes in the present.²² With its odd generic blend of first-responder drama, action, and horror, the moral universe of *9-1-1* is one not unfamiliar to horror fans. Larger forces are at work than the characters' individual choices—quasi-supernatural ones, reflecting an enveloping spiritual worldview that demands acceptance.

Murphy's politics of production—in cleaving to both diversity and color-blind casting practices, especially for older (mostly white) women, black women and men, differently bodied actors (including, famously, mentally challenged ones), LGBTQ talent of all types, and most recently, LatinX performers—exceed Slater's standard fill-in-the-diversity-blank efforts, as Murphy attempts to historicize at least some of his characters within the narrative in ways that match up with their or their performers' cultural backgrounds. This is most evident in his prestige-TV work for FX such as *American Crime Story: The People v. O.J. Simpson* (2016), where not only did he utilize a large cast of African

American actors whose prominence in the narrative equaled those of his white performers, but he also hired black directors and screenwriters to help contribute cultural perspectives to this story. And in *American Crime Story: The Assassination of Gianni Versace* (2018), he didn't just cast Filipino American actor Darren Criss (from his *Glee*) to play gay Filipino serial killer Andrew Cunanan, bucking the whitewashing trend of casting European Americans in Asian American lead roles, he also had LatinX performers play Italian national roles such as Gianni Versace (Edgar Ramirez) and Donatella Versace (Penelope Cruz), reversing the Hollywood patterns where Italian Americans play LatinX leading roles (e.g. Al Pacino in Brian de Palma's controversial "Cuban" immigrant version of *Scarface*). Murphy's ability to cast in ways that cut against the commonsense sexist, racist, ableist, homophobic hiring practices of creative industry are enabled by his cultivation of a "troupe" of performers whom he uses time and again, both searching out older film actresses whom Hollywood has left behind and writing age-specific roles for them (e.g. *Fend: Bette and Joan* featuring Jessica Lange, his longtime muse, and Susan Sarandon) and grooming those who come from minority backgrounds (such as Criss) for larger and larger roles. Unlike Rhimes, who famously practices what she's called a "no asshole"/ "when people show you who they are, believe them" hiring policy, he tends to work with big (and sometimes troubled) film stars from time to time, and I suspect that his now-rich white-male power-broker status helps him wrangle them effectively.

In contrast with Murphy, gay Irish American 1.5 immigrant playwright and screenwriter-producer John Logan evinces no interest in building a TV empire, but he does regularly procure high-status screenwriting work in fantastic (*The Time Machine*; *Star Trek: Nemesis*; *Alien: Covenant*) and fantastic-adjacent (the James Bond series' *Skyfall* and *Spectre*; the animated *Rango*; *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*) genre films along with authoring scripts for cinematic period pieces (*Gladiator*; *Coriolanus*; *The Last Samurai*; *The Aviator*). A working film writer whose more radical politics were honed through his LGBTQ stage plays where he got to set the story premises and exert relatively full control over their execution, while in the movie industry, most of the time, selection of story was not in his hands, he had to negotiate development of his scripts with studio producers and directors—until that is, he reached the A-list cinematic-screenwriter level and took his shot at writing and developing his own TV series, Showtime's *Penny Dreadful* (2014-2016). Partnering with British filmmaker Sam Mendes (*American Beauty*, *The Road to Perdition*) as his co-executive producer gave him the

credibility and protection as a TV artist to oversee and manage the series the way he saw fit. The quality that most strikes me about Logan as a writer is his elevation of the standard two-character dramatic dialog scene into an stagey, somewhat ornate, monologue-driven confessional—a particularly Irish Catholic narrative practice, I have come to think, after initially despising it for years because I did not understand Logan’s cultural writing style. I first became aware of this trademark technique when viewing Ridley Scott’s *Gladiator* (2000), a film that enervated me to the point where I wanted to leave the theater because of scenes such as the one in which villainous Roman Emperor Commodus (Joaquin Phoenix) and his sister Lucilla (Connie Nielsen) speak intimately, desperately in the dark, as Commodus harangues Lucilla to explain why their former childhood friend, Maximus (Russell Crowe), whom Commodus has enslaved as a gladiator out of jealousy, has earned the admiration of the Roman people. Lucilla here is just a narrative pawn, offering stock interruptions in what is (what I initially considered to be) a stridently lyrical and hyperbolic monologue by Commodus, including paragraphs of repeated revelatory information which the film has already shown us, such as:

COMMODUS: ... (M)y mind settles on but one question: What kind of world are we making when the people of Rome prefer a slave in the arena to their father? It is my responsibility to make the world as it should be. How is it that I have made the world?

LUCILLA:

Brother, do not be influenced by the mob. They are a great, faceless beast—

COMMODUS: They are not “the mob,” Lucilla, they are the people. They are my children and all I want to do is love them. Our father loved Maximus—and I love him still—yet he defies me, he tasks me in front of my children. And they love him for it. Just as Marcus loved him for it. Tell me why, Lucilla.

LUCILLA: They see themselves in him. They throw in their own sad dreams alongside his. They think he fights for them.

COMMODUS: And what do I do but fight for them? I give them games to please them. I strangle dissent to give them peace. I empower the Praetorians to give them order. What more can I do?

Say I should fight him, in the arena. Let my children see who the Gods truly favor...

After a few minutes, I found myself claustrophobic, as if I were trapped in an overly personal exchange between two close friends united by some sick emotional dynamic. Experiencing Logan's Academy-Award-winning but circular dialog as memorably exhausting, I thought: Why make these motivations so explicit—what happened to the basic rule of showing and not telling in cinema? Two years later, sitting in the theater for *Star Trek: Nemesis* (2002), I underwent the same nauseating sensation of being closed in, again, during a two-character dialog scene, shot tightly, intensely transpiring in the dark. This time, it was between adopted human-Roman rebel Praetor Shinzon (Tom Hardy) and his mentor the Roman Viceroy (Ron Perlman), as Shinzon offers his whole backstory of why he loathes the Roman Empire, a tale related to Romans' enslavement of Romans. The force of emotion between the two felt like a closed circuit, tight and strangulating, with the full power of Shinzon's malevolent energy aimed towards the screen. When I looked up the screenwriter afterwards, I realized that this was a purposeful technique. By the time I saw Logan's Bond films, *Skyfall* and *Spectre*, I knew to expect "the scene," having come to respect this auteurist device which formerly caused me so much discomfort. The *Skyfall* example (2012) became both historic and well-known, as it featured a tied-up James Bond (Daniel Craig) confronted by bisexual villain Raoul Silva (Javier Bardem, the first major LGBTQ antagonist, rather than supporting character, in the series) who torturously fondled the agent as he revealed the reasons behind his hatred for Bond's current and his own former boss "M," while 007 "bravely" flirted back. *Spectre* (2015) found Bond confronting a dying former antagonist, Mr. White (Jester Christensen), who had once helped the terrorist organization SPECTRE kill the agent's wife. The scene is not powered by hatred, but the more powerful emotion of despair. White is dying painfully from thallium poisoning from that organization, and he knows Bond will be hunted to death, too. "So, here we are, Mr. Bond. Two dead men enjoying the evening," White says, bitterly explaining the course of events that led him to this dark house where he spends his last days. After Bond pushes the ailing terrorist to reveal

the whereabouts of the man who will prove to be classic 007 master villain Ernst Stavro Blofeld, promising to protect White's daughter, he passes his gun to the dying man who shoots himself after dramatically first aiming the gun at the agent. In a messy and imperfect film, this stands out as the single most powerful, cohesive scene, more grounded and moving than any other in the film. As Logan grows more effective as a writer, "the scene" evolves into something that doesn't only sicken but also moves me. However, another factor in play with the Bond movies in particular, was that he had by then become a top-level screenwriter, with studios, directors, and producers less likely to second-guess or overwrite his dialog sequences. Thus when he reached the pinnacle of his workplace autonomy with *Penny Dreadful*, as he took on the mantle of showrunner and hit the top of the media-project ladder for the first time in his career, I should not have been surprised, but felt the wind knocked out of me, by this scene. The dialog exchange between Lily Frankenstein/Brona Croft (Billie Piper), the character traditionally known as the bride of Frankenstein's Creature in Mary Shelley's classic work and most transmedial adaptations of *Frankenstein*, and Caliban/John Clare, the Creature (Rory Kinnear), in which the latter tries to bully the former, a re-animated lower-class Irish factory and sex worker, shocks when she suddenly fights back, physically dominating him with murderous rage and an accompanying six-minute monologue which fans have nicknamed "Lily's rage" (from which the below has been excerpted):

LILY: We flatter our men with our pain. We bow before them. We make ourselves dolls for their amusement. We lose our dignity in corsets and high shoes and gossip and the slavery of marriage! And our reward? The back of the hand, the face turned to the pillow, the bloody, aching cunt as you force us ... to take your fat, heaving bodies!...Never again will I kneel to any man. Now they will kneel to me, as you do, monster.²³

Fitting well with the other postcolonial reimaginings of classic British and US horror characters—a South Asian Indian Dr. Jekyll, an American anti-settler-colonial werewolf, a non-binary Dorian Grey, and others—this new bride is queer, androgynistic, monstrously superior to humankind, poor, and Irish. Having been assimilated (by sexist Victor Frankenstein, who Pygmalion-like, teaches her middle-class British behavior and speech), exploited, and assaulted by various male characters up to this point in the series, she offers

the speech as a new mission statement, leaving the Creature quivering in shock, stunned by the force of her power. And I realize that I feel just like him. I have always been that shattered mess of an audience, hearing his words. At last, I understand that the very privacy of the moment is what energizes its spiritual maelstrom. Most backstory monologues written for the sake of climactic self-revelation in US films are performed in front of a sizable audience in that story world, on some large public stage or over a wide-ranging broadcast system, if possible. After 16 years of not quite getting John Logan's work, I finally get it. His horror gift is putting us right beside the souls of monstrous villainy, terrifyingly, intimately, so that we can imbibe their nakedly mad logic without resisting, being spoonfed the poisonous bromide of his circuitously poetic language, administered in chokingly close quarters. We are in the demon's confessional, and even as its priests, we are not safe.

From a production standpoint, Logan made sure he was in control of the scripts, by essentially not having a writers' room, an unusual management practice that does not work with most shows due to the fast time pressures of production. He hired two or three writer interns who once in a blue moon wrote a teleplay for an episode or two, but mainly were there to relieve him of the pressures of showrunning, as he wrote the majority of episodes through the three-year run. But the aspect of his production that strikes me most deeply is his move, as an Irish immigrant to the US, to relocate production from the UK (where Showtime network's British coproduction company, Sky, had been located) to his ancestral homeland of Ireland, adding to *Game of Thrones'* filming there to stimulate the local economy and also provide Irish media workers with industry experience. At the top levels of below-the-line work, he hired seasoned Eastern European film artists for costumers and diverse and capable directors including indigenous Oceanic filmmaker Toa Fraser of Fiji, who collectively gave the series a beautiful look that has won many technical TV awards including Emmys. I find myself delighted realizing that, for a US-UK coproduction, a lot of the budget went to Irish and global workers within Ireland itself. Most of all, Logan's practical, political-economic yet artistic strategy of saving his best ideas for a show that he owned and controlled a large part of, not for his work-for-hire film writing for major studios, is a lesson I will long keep with me.

In his article for *The Atlantic*, "*The Exorcist* and the Lost Art of Catholic Storytelling," Nick Ripatrazone mourns the ways that Catholic forms of spiritual narrative no longer reveal

themselves in literary form, even in literature written by Catholics. He summarizes good Catholic stories as ones where

Faith is often buoyed by doubt. God and grace are mysterious, often impenetrable. Belief does not erase fear, anxiety, and pain from the world—yet belief offers a way forward into and through the dark.

As neogothic, queer, Catholic storytellers, Murphy, with his staunch sense of LGBTQ genealogy and aggressively diversity-centered business agenda, and Logan, with his adept repurposing of Western colonial tropes and moneys towards centralizing the subaltern and colonized, bring the essence of the New Weird through that dark and out into the televisual sensorium of millennial horror. These showrunning auteurs utilize their US white-male privilege to create workplace conditions in which progressive feminist pro-queer and critical perspectives of society can be transmitted through seemingly simple horror stories, like Barker stretching the genre's conventions from its default conservatism of ridiculing and demeaning the "deviant" towards the true terrors of power and its violent history against the oppressed.

Notes

1. From *9-1-1* (S1E2, airdate 01/10/18).
2. From *Spectre* (2015).
3. See the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, which among other things, measures gender inclusion in films and TV ("*See Jane*").
4. The Mother Bernadette (Deana Dunaghan) story arc beginning in "The Moveable Feast" (S1E4, airdate October 14, 2016) demonstrated that some of the Church's female fighters of demons struggled against the devilish Pazuzu by countering its evil with loving energy and forgiveness, not martial energy and spiritual violence.
5. See Bechdel et. al., who credit "The Rule" of the Bechdel Test to Liz Wallace: for feminists to view a film, the narrative text must (1) contain at least two women, who (2) talk to each other, (3) about something other than a man. To me, since Pazuzu/ demons in general possess no inherent gender in the series, Season 1 attempts to illustrate a female, if

not feminist subjectivity—by narratively foregrounding and spiritually testing the relationships between Angela Rance and her two teen daughters—however troubling the show’s patriarchal premise and visual motifs.

6. Angela’s husband had been brain-damaged and thus “slow” compared to his earlier self, so he qualifies as disabled; her possessed daughter demonstrated bisexual interest in another teen just before her demonic takeover.

7. S2E5, airdate 11/03/17.

8. Cho had gotten his start in comedy, delivering the infamous, immediately viral “Mother I’d love to fuck” phrase in Mexican American directing team Chris and Paul Weitz’s sex farce *American Pie*—permanently introducing “MILF” into the English lexicon.

9. Here and in following sections I use TV comedies as a benchmark for progress against audio-visual whitewashing and white-male privilege, because compared to dramas and reality TV, both of which include a relatively fair amount of gender, racial, and LGBTQ on-camera diversity, situation comedies remain the last bastion of white-male privilege, both in front of, and behind, the camera, with traditional multi-camera comedies (the type that resemble earlier ones “shot in stage” with a laughtrack and fixed camera positions) generally less diverse in content than single-camera ones (with moving cameras).

10. For instance, consider all of Ross’s non-Rachel girlfriends in the long-running 1990s hit sitcom *Friends*, which included a black female scientist, an Asian American professional, and a white British woman. See Boakeye.

11. Case in point: Slater bought a very expensive Hollywood house shortly after the series’ cancellation—a typical, if trite, gesture of “arriving” as an industry player (Flemming).

12. As I write this chapter, Fox just rescheduled two critically lauded series created and managed by white women showrunners, series known for their strong feminist orientations and well-executed diversity content, to this time slot known for low-rated viewership: *Jane the Virgin* (2014-2019, with an overwhelmingly LatinX cast, characters, and themes) and *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* (2015-2019, with significant FilipinX cast and characters). While at least the network performed the respectful act of discussing in advance with *Jane* boss Jennie Snyder Urman and *Crazy* innovator Rachel Bloom, that their shows would end with this last, upcoming, 2018-2019 season—allowing them to wrap up their series in dignified ways that Kapnek hadn’t been able to do with *Selfie*, and Fox is broadcasting Urman’s highly diversity-

cast reboot of its beloved witch show *Charmed* right as *Jane* ends, the Friday evening time slot still lowers the viewing numbers for most scripted series.

13. The former arc started in season 4, episode 7 (airdate November 4, 2010); see Nussbaum for her ambivalent review of this generally positively received, and highly rated, show. For Rhimes' partnership with RAINN over the latter episode, "The Time Has Come" (season 5, episode 13; airdate February 2, 2012), see "Private Practice Partners with RAINN as ABC Makes TV History" (RAINN), the historical aspect being the first portrayal of male-on-male military sexual assault in scripted TV.

14. "Vermont is for Lovers, Too" (season 3, episode 8 of *Scandal*; air date November 21, 2013).

15. This quote is from Martin.

16. Season 3, episode 9; airdate December 5, 2013.

17. Though *Scandal* is not recognized as science fiction, its premise was loosely based on a black female spin doctor who consulted for the first Bush Administration and who advised Monica Lewinsky on surviving the Clinton Administration's sex scandal. As such, it presents a lightly alternative history in which recent Presidents such as Obama and Trump never got elected, and instead, fictional libertarian-Republican ex-couple Fitzgerald and Mellie Grant become successors to that US throne. *Scandal*'s empathetic cast of regular characters keep justifying the terribly illegal, immoral, and violent actions they perform as for the good of "The Republic," in the show's lingua franca.

18. *Superstition* has made horror-TV history, not just showrun and co-created by black writer-producer Joel Anderson Thompson with coproducer and star Mario Van Peebles, directing and acting son of notable Blaxploitation star and director Melvin Van Peebles of the 1970s, but featuring a mostly African American cast of characters who confront demons and other supernatural forces of evil in their own regional community. I find it not very good personally, but I am not knowledgeable of the black "B"-film cinematic traditions from which these two showrunners are obviously drawing to tell these Afrohorror TV tales.

19. Occasionally, people of color and women of color rise to executive-producer levels, but rarely acquire the top position of showrunner, in fantastic television shows. Even when they become showrunners, this "promotion" is patterned through deep connections with white-male power structures—for instance, Lisa Joy, Taiwanese American showrunner of *Westworld*, is married to her co-showrunner, the screenwriter-producer Jonathan Nolan,

brother of science fiction film maven Christopher Nolan; Maurissa Tancharoen, Thai American showrunner of *Agents of Shield*, is married to her co-showrunner, screenwriter-producer Jed Whedon, brother of superhero film writing-directing star Joss Whedon. I am not saying that these female showrunners lacked talent or credentials to earn these positions; I am saying that other equally capable female writer-producers and men of color writer-producers do not make it to this level, because they do not possess the same personal connections. Even for white women, a whole dissertation could be written about talented female fantastic-TV (Michele Fazekas and Tara Butters of superhero show *Agent Carter* and urban fantasy *Kevin Probably Saves the World*) and other genre-TV showrunners (Marti Noxon of *UnREAL*, *Girlfriends Guide to Divorce*, and *Code Black*) who had to negotiate around powerful writer-producers such as Joss Whedon, known for his extensive, inappropriate workplace sexual relationships with female performers and writers, but also for the way his TV shows generated strong women producers, many of whom later became showrunners. Exceptions to this pattern of white-male showrunners in fantastic TV, are Julie Plec, showrunner of *The Vampire Diaries*, and Felicia D. Henderson whom I mentioned in Chapter 1; for these shows, both women had “diverse” male producers backing their efforts up—Plec was supported by out-gay super producer Kevin Williamson (horror film writer and urban fantasy TV show producer of *Scream*) and Henderson by Roberto Orci, LatinX writer-producer of the *Star Trek* rebooted film series.

20. Season 1, episode 2; airdates 01/10/18.

21. Season 1, episode 7; airdates 02/28/18.

22. Season 1, episode 8; airdates 03/07/18.

23. Season 2, episode 9; airdates 06/21/16.

CHAPTER 4.
WHEN WOMEN, IMMIGRANTS, AND “MULTITUDINOUS” OTHERS DEVELOP
SCRIPTS DIFFERENTLY (OR, MY CREATIVE-WRITING PEDAGOGY)

“...(T)he crew on these (‘007’ films) are very regular crew...
so it's always interesting when you introduce new blood into these.

They always bring a fresh perspective in.”

—Lee Tamahori, the first indigenous man and man of color
to direct a “James Bond” movie

“...(W)hen you know that you're a bit outside of your own experience,
how do you get that right? And how do you make sure
that you're addressing complicated subjects that you know are divisive
in a way that feels provocative, honest, but also self aware?”

—Nina Jacobsen, executive producer, *The People v. O.J. Simpson: American Crime Story*

“1: She was never going to play the honey pot. ...

(2:) She’s never going to a strip club. ...

(3:) I didn’t need to hear the word ‘bitch.’”

—Melissa Rosenberg, series creator, *Jessica Jones*,
on establishing basic rules for her titular protagonist

Screen Writers As A Class: Art And Commerce, Multitude V. Proletariat

My action-loving heart is being broken, bit by bit. It’s that damn watch. The pilot is for *Lethal Weapon*, airing prime time on Fox (2016-present), based on the urban films of the same name (1987-1998) which along with the *Die Hard* movie franchise (1988-2013) had exploded onto the Hollywood scene when I was a college undergraduate. The two libertarian series joined explicitly conservative, paramilitary films headlined by Sylvester Stallone (the *Rambo* series, 1982-present), and Arnold Schwarzenegger (1985’s *Commando*; 1986’s *Raw Deal*), to define the modern action blockbuster in the late twentieth century. Part comedy, part noir, part city cop thriller, the *Lethal Weapon* and *Die Hard* flicks resuscitated macho cinema in ways that stole wholeheartedly from the hip underground languages of Blaxploitation and kung-fu flicks of the 1960s and 1970s and—unlike their Stallone/Schwarzenegger cohorts—drew fans from educated professional audiences,

because their narratives held flashes of serious drama centered around flawed male protagonists making their way through post-Vietnam US-criminal cityscapes. But the core appeal of the *Lethal Weapon*/*Die Hard* urban action blockbuster lay in its shamelessly cheesy fantasy of spectacle—usually exhibited during the summertime in wide theatrical releases for US and global audiences—via violent, effects-driven sequences largely unburdened by the cinematic political conscience of the 1960s or movies’ sociological self-explorations in the 1970s. Ideologically, the urban action blockbuster bolstered the conservative cultural pylons beneath the weakened audiovisual iconographies of US empire, reviving them in the hip late postwar era from the twin wounds of the dying Western and the ailing spy flick by appealing broadly to everyone. The urban action blockbuster took its place among other Hollywood updates to mainstream masculine film forms from this era onward, especially in the 1990s: openly militaristic, neo-jingoistic movies of Michael Bay and the Scott brothers (Tony and Ridley, director cofounders of Scott Free Productions), footage from which would be used in US military training curricula to educate young recruits soon sent to the nation’s Middle-Eastern campaigns, as well as more liberal, heavily CG-aided, planet-saving, fluffy SF-action fare by Roland Emmerich and Steven Spielberg.¹

The narrative rollercoaster of the urban action blockbuster offered the pleasure of hyped-up hand-to-hand combat, fast-cut vehicular chases, exploitatively troped old-school sins (sex-drugs-crime-corruption), tough or spunky postfeminist damsels in distress, and neighborhood- or city-threatening explosives, set to wall-to-wall soundtracks designed to deploy loud music and exaggerated gun and bomb sounds to stun audiences into acquiescence aurally, a sort of addictive biopolitical crack for the vacationing brain. Geoff King, author of *Spectacular Narratives: Hollywood in the Age of the Blockbuster* (2001), attributes the rise of the general action-blockbuster genre to the conglomeration of Hollywood studios, their increasing reliance upon both transmedia product sales (especially from theme parks and videogames) and overseas box office for profits, and the film industry’s response to the changing demographics of TV and other leisure activities (1-2). He views this genre’s thematic shift as the opposition of older Western frontier narratives with the “articulation of technological or bureaucratic modernity,” and argues against critics who condemn it as non-classical and anti-narrative, weak in plot or lacking in character development, instead identifying its strong narrative and characterological structures (2). For me, coming of age as a young feminist in the mid-1980s, at once both ideologically repulsed by the genre and

deeply drawn to its predictable formula typified by anti-authoritarian city-bred heroes outrunning an earth-shaking and fiery detonation in slow motion while spouting snarky quips to a thunderous rock/rap soundscape, my body responds to the cultural power of this very structured narrative form. The narrative's power entreats me to overlook what fantastic-cinema scholar Butler terms "fantasy violence," one of several generic traits and developments he identifies within the history of the US fantasy film, by setting up an ethical landscape in which characters' violent but morally justified actions are portrayed through realistic methods but with non-real outcomes, i.e., no consequences (29-34). Script doctor Denny Martin Flinn, who specializes in "high-concept" blockbuster revisions—such as those he administered to co-author the screenplay for *Star Trek IV: The Undiscovered Country*—takes apart this genre's powerful story formula in his screenwriting handbook (1999). He cites Hollywood producing team Lloyd Levin and Lawrence Gordon, mentors of Joel Silver, whose filmmaking company would later shepherd through *The Matrix* series, *Watchmen*, and other groundbreaking if arty SF-action films by directing auteurs such as the Wachowskis, but who early in his career had learned from Levin-Gordon the narrative structure of the modern blockbuster when Silver produced the *Lethal Weapon* films. Levin and Gordon passed along to Silver the notion that within these action features, every 11 minutes, something should happen to move the story forward: either what the industry calls a plot "twist" or what Levin-Gordon had labeled a "whammy" or narrative surprise (190-210). As an action-addicted audience member, I experience twists and whammies like heart-pounding shots of adrenalin, pumping up the stakes artificially every 11 minutes, like clockwork. As a scripter of fantasy violence, they remind me that every 11 pages or about one-tenth of the screenplay's length, something should happen to shake up the characters and thus the viewers.

But my action-loving heart is being broken, because in the *Lethal Weapon* TV pilot, the twists and whammies are being obscured by a stupid and unnecessary watch, interfering with the delivery of my narrative adrenalin. *Lethal Weapon*, "buddy cop" pairing of sensible, middle-aged, on-the-verge-of-retirement, black police officer Roger Murtaugh (played by TV/film veteran Damon Wayans, Jr., who replaces the film franchise's Danny Glover), a suburban family man, and his younger partner, the recently widowed, suicidal white cowboy Martin Riggs (newcomer Clayne Crawford, replacing Mel Gibson in the movie versions), who frequently drinks himself to sleep and who engages in brutally effective, if self-

endangering and unconventional, methods for confronting criminals, should be what industry folk call a “two hander,” splitting its screen time evenly between the co-protagonist duo. However, after the pilot’s first sequence introduces Texan Riggs and the tragic accident that killed his wife and unborn child, the appearance of a third “protagonist” shocks me at the beginning of scene two. Following the obligatory exterior shot of the Murtaugh family home (“Los Angeles, California, 6 months later”), the subsequent interior sequence that captures Roger and his wife talking in their bed begins by focusing not on his face or the couple’s bodies, but with a close-up of the smooth face of an Apple Watch wrapped around Roger’s wrist, positioned atop his belly, before the camera pans up to reveal the older cop’s chest scar from his recent heart surgery, then finally, his annoyed face. In other words, as a TV audience, we actually see the watch fill the screen before we notice co-lead Roger himself; moreover, the sequence opens to the watch’s high-pitched beeping sound, before either African American performer’s opening line or other vocal expression (such as Roger’s long sigh which constitutes the first sound emanating from his mouth even prior to his dialog) can even register on the soundtrack. The deft script quickly establishes the diegetic credibility of the watch, in case audience members have missed its iMac-like live display of Roger’s current medical data: the beeping occurs whenever he gets excited to the point where his fragile heart beats too quickly for his health. Throughout the episode, then, the teleplay writer-showrunner Matt Miller and his director-co-producer (dynamic videomaker McG, who directed the *Charlie’s Angels* films in the early 2000s) essentially turn this watch into a third leading character, a co-protagonist who rides upon Roger’s anxiety, turning up through escalating aural beeps and edited camera inserts of its face every time the African American police officer faces a stressful situation, uprooting Damon Wayans’ performance. I timed it, and we both see the watch’s high-tech display and hear its alarm four times throughout the episode’s 40-minute run: in that bedroom scene when the couple argues over Roger’s possibly health-endangering return to his job; when Roger first meets Riggs amidst a violent confrontation with gun-toting bank robbers; when Roger and Riggs in their car pursue a suspect through the freeway; and when that chase leads the men’s vehicle into a faster, more hazardous pursuit beside competing sports cars in the Grand Prix. It also makes its presence known in a fifth scene, beeping without showing its face a third of the way through the pilot, when Roger confronts the men’s captain about his crazy partner—an interaction where the captain actually POINTS TO THE WATCH, says, “Calm down, that

thing's gonna explode," making Roger visibly turn it off, before smoothly picking up the episode's story with his next line. During the two car chases, when Roger and Riggs argue over the implications of the watch's rising noise, the scripted narrative similarly points viewers' attention to the watch. Riggs indirectly refers to the object in his dialog that implies that if Roger's too old to drive during this unorthodox chase, he should move over and let Riggs take the wheel, as Roger noticeably struggles to turn off the watch's sounds while driving and Riggs pushes himself underneath Roger's body to commandeer the driver's seat. In other scenes in which these sounds and inserts do not occur, Roger is notably wearing the watch—a detail made all the clearer, as the script and direction make the older performer wear shirts with the sleeves pushed up his forearms towards the elbows, thus highlighting the watch's position on his wrist ... of course, for diegetic reasons (rolling the sleeves up to prepare to grasp a gun to face the robbers; to put on police-issued medical gloves so as to handle a crime scene's corpse; to cook for his family in their home). Five prominent appearances total in 40 minutes, I think, feeling my own heart rate rise in irritation each time the Apple Watch gets foregrounded by the televisual narrative, is textbook Levin-Gordon script structure (a little less than 1 every 10 minutes).² But I can't enjoy the lamely scripted twists and whammies, because of the overly obvious, poorly executed product placement arising alongside each plot turn.

And I'm no academic purist. It's not as if I wholeheartedly oppose integrating commercials into scripted television: as I observed in Chapter 1, the formal negotiation between art and commerce has been reflected within TV texts since the very start of the medium. I didn't find it objectionable when, for instance, in fairy-tale-adjacent rom-com telenovela *Jane the Virgin* (the CW), Venezuelan American heroine Jane, her mother, and her *abuela* visit Target as a result of the retailer's shameless push for LatinX family consumers and female millennials; or when in clever interstitials for the Batman prequel series *Gotham* (Fox), rising stars playing the Riddler and the Penguin seem to drive to the show's set in Ford vehicles while explaining that superhero world's behind-the-scenes production details and plugging those cars' special features.³ I enjoy the creative ways that the narrative presence of goods like Invisalign "invisible" braces and laundry detergent gets carefully, humorously, even ironically established within televisual diegeses between delightfully feminist numbers such as musical sequences where a mother explicitly enlightens her daughter about having one's period in punk-maternal comedy *Odd Mom Out* (Bravo)—

especially since these ads have been clearly written towards the generic stylings of such shows or for their particular audiences, supporting these series' story worlds, not competing with them.⁴ I embraced the regional dining establishment product placement such as cupcakes from New York's Magnolia Bakery in *Sex and the City*. And though it took some acclimating on my behalf, I have come not to mind fictional characters "patronizing" real dining establishments, either, such as the all-black female friends of *Girlfriends* (the UPN) regularly referencing the visits of one friend and her family to Chili's, largely located offscreen in her suburban neighborhood of Calabasas, California, or (in its early seasons, before it became a monster hit) *The Big Bang Theory* (CBS) setting extended scenes in the Pasadena Cheesesteak Factory where two of its key female characters supposedly worked. For shows facing difficult economic challenges, such as female- or minority-starring series (JTV, OMO), struggling productions still seeking out their core audience (BBT), or expensively effects-driven or pricy production-designed fantastic-genre TV (*Gotham*), product placement means the producers are performing the work of attempting to keep the show on the air, staving off the network's possible cancellation by demonstrating to their bosses its commercial appeal by this kind of "outside" budgetary support, at least until they can justify its renewal through promising Nielsen ratings, critics' glowing reviews, and/or digitally significant collective fan expression. I even admire the postmodern self-awareness of what I have labeled the "transmedia one-two punch double ad": a scripted moment with product placement within the TV narrative, followed prominently by the actual ad for the product itself during ensuing commercial time to reinforce the first ad's impact in ways that formally, self-consciously mimic the scripted moment. As far as I can tell, the strongly LGBTQ/POC showrunners of *Empire* (Fox), a night-time industrial soap opera that—not unironically—features the travails of African American singers who navigate the delicate balance between their aural-performative artistry and the corporate music business, has pioneered this audience-playful ad technique. I recall my jaw dropping at the aesthetic audacity and narrative complexity of the sequence that cross-mediated genres from the scripted (fictional show) to the consciously commercial (real TV ad) which first made me aware of the transmedia one-two punch double ad during an episode of *Empire*. In the show's story world, at a "viewing party" hosted by Pepsi Co., the multiple-protagonist members of the Lyon family, a wealthy and powerful black musical dynasty, become the first to preview a soft-drink ad within which their rapper son Jamal performs. In the ad within

this collective-viewing scene, Jamal is shown as clad in the latest urban fashion, strutting through a NYC subway, where he playfully interacts with and sings for city denizens, sucks down a Pepsi, then exits the train into a building where he runs up a flight of stairs and begins performing at a huge concert. In terms of narrative presentation, the viewers are first made to watch the full advertisement along with the Lyonses, then they observe this fictional family's and Jamal's reactions to the ad's preview within the episode's story, and finally, they watch the very same ad which starts off the real commercial block that directly follows that scripted scene. The class-flattering message—that you're watching the Pepsi ad debut along with this royalty-like family, as if part of their special entourage, then imbibing it again with the less-special consumers who will see it play over and over on TV and other ICT platforms forthwith but who might not have been fortunate enough to have “shared” in this special television moment—and its participatory playfulness strokes the self-awareness of sophisticated viewers, especially African Americans, analyzed by US marketing specialists as both very picky consumers and connoisseurs of commercial advertising as an art form.⁵ This ad's multilayered design—as well as another later in the series' run, also developed by *Empire* producers along with Pepsi, which shows a chaotic wedding scene of various Lyonses fighting then fleeing the church in melodramatic conflict, right before an actual soft-drink commercial in which that *scene gets re-enacted by animated Pepsi bottles* dressed up in wedding wear similar to those of the characters—tickled even my commercially jaded funny bone. So despite my five-decade existence, I'm no baby-boomer-idealist, twentieth-century analog, anti-ad snob. But the actual Apple Watch commercial within *Lethal Weapon*'s own transmedia one-two punch double ad, positioned right after the pilot's opening credits during the first break—by which time that watch has debuted visually and aurally twice within the scripted narrative—leaves me cold and unimpressed.

As an indicator of how normalized product placement and other “Native” aka story- (or editorial-content-) entwined advertisement strategies have become in the age of Peak TV, journalist Lee Trenholm criticizes the *Lethal Weapon* pilot not for its egregious protagonizing of the fitness-tracking product, but instead for the producers' participation in the recent transmedial trend of adapting beloved hybrid-genre action movies (such as, he says, Mexican American indie filmmaker Robert Rodriguez's ultraviolent 1996 vampire thriller *From Dusk to Dawn*) into TV series (e.g. *From Dusk to Dawn: The Series* on Rodriguez's El Rey network, 2014-2016).⁶ Subtitled “Mel Gibson is Out and the Apple Watch is in, but is this Fad for

Adapting Movies into TV Shows a Bad Idea?", Trenholm's *CNET* piece bemoans the way that the teleplay for *Lethal Weapon*, like other recent film-to-TV intermediations, takes minor, unexplicated plot details from the movie's story world then expands on those details through fully explanatory, standalone episodes or even fleshes them out through season-long televisual arcs. To this TV critic, the product placement is a clever promotional device worthy of his review's attention-getting title, but not a subject that commands close aesthetic or narrative analyses. A more thoughtful engagement with product placement as a televisual expressive form comes from *otaku* (belonging to nerd/techie/fanboy cultures—a term adapted from Japanese participatory cultures) journalist Nick Mangione, who evaluates the pilot's running ad in terms of the geek-friendly, geek-scripted aspects of *Lethal Weapon*'s story development practices, which demonstrate respect for its target audience of pop-culture-submerged nerds like me, by drafting creative labor from among otaku community ranks:

The new series manages to have everything we remember and love from the original movie while it remains fresh and modern. This is why it pays to have geeks in the writers room...

The one part that felt a little forced was the constant cuts to Murtaugh's heart monitor Apple Watch app during the action scenes. I don't know if they were supposed to add or be funny, but they accomplished neither. They only served to tell us how much money Apple paid for product placement.

I relate strongly to millennials, who confuse corporate advertisers with the weird combination of relative acceptance of commercial narrative modes yet notoriously fickle and inattentive "loyalty" as consumers. The cohort's seemingly conservative and unpredictable spending practices reflect, to me, a critical curation of commercial-media-disseminated information and innate resistance to advertising directives. An otaku myself, I grew up reciting catchy soundbytes and rewriting the many geek-memed tropes in the participatory playground of US commercial pop-culture for my nerd friends, developing tools of expressive agency including a degree of inoculation against branded brainwashing in the process. One such media literacy skill involved learning to what extent I might "play with" advertisements at face value ("Mickey D's? Cool reminder; I'm feeling like some fries...no, wait, I've changed my mind.") versus shove them off as commercial distractions that do not reflect my human needs at the moment. Much more than me, bred with a consciousness interacting inside of digital and social technologies, millennials do not care about the gross

omnipresence of commercial consumerism, which they embrace as part and parcel of the given mode of cultural production for this era's ICTs. But they do respect company brands that appear to practice inclusion, truth-in-advertising, and quality control, as they critically evaluate the narrative and world-building qualities of corporate commercial strategies that articulate these traits and thus signal a brand's core identity.⁷ For Mangione, this ad thus reflects the poor narrative expression of a disingenuous brand, Apple, that underestimates the artistic erudition its target demographic; for me, it lacks the witty originality and postmodern edge of the *Empire*-Pepsi campaign, especially *Lethal Weapon*'s poorly considered, patronizing efforts to integrate the show's thematic content (a recovering fifty-something heart-attack victim) with the product's commercial symbolism (a device that can track the fitness condition of audience members similarly afflicted), ultimately appearing both ageist and racist. As I receive this TV text in my mindscape, as a middle-aged consumer of color about the same age as Roger afflicted by a similar heart ailment, the scenes with the Apple Watch seem to over-emphasize the vulnerable medical condition of one member of this cop team, over the more hidden (i.e. not signaled with audio cues or product cutaways) disability of the other member, cumulatively depicting the older black man as less capable on the job than his younger white partner. Of course, this impression also could be skewed by my fandom in the transmedial franchise or by my participation in a multi-campus, community-engaged effort to educate university administrators, faculty, and staff and Honolulu residents about mental health issues, especially long-term depression and related self-destructive behavior, as part of my own liberational death-work as a horror writer.⁸ Because of my fan familiarity and my awareness of trauma victimhood as a cross-demographic manifestation of corporealized marginality, I view *Lethal Weapon* as a disability text.

As a horror connoisseur and writer, I have long thought about the orientation of my genre towards its audience, especially considering the violence, sexism/misogyny, homophobia, colonialism, and other harmful thematic legacies it tends to comport to listeners, readers, viewers, and participants in the contemporary mass-media horror narrative. What kind of impacts would a progressive horror tale assert upon its audience, by contrast? How do I utilize this historically problematic, Eurocentric, classist, heterosexist genre towards meaningful, socially responsible storytelling? For answers, I return to the genre's older pre-gothic origins in serving a folkloric informational function within premodern communities, when its earlier intermediations such as fairy and folktales had preserved

critical cultural knowledge for survival. Horror modes of storytelling had helped caution community listeners/audiences against the physical and social dangers of society, aided them in dealing with the often unavoidable violent injustices and oppression of daily life, furnished them with moral guidelines for regarding those with visible or cultural differences (sometimes problematically), and guided them through what had seemed ineffable challenges presented by illness, disease, death, trauma, and other corporeal challenges which had no doubt seemed inexplicable to those whose cultural sciences had not yet advanced to explain it logically.

I think of my horror writing as part of a larger set of community death-work practices, including the protection, healing, and nourishment of the non-normative body, whether aging, of color, female, indigenous, queer, foreign, disabled, or otherwise marked as different. My two decades of spiritual training by acupuncturists, meditation teachers, and various cultural healing practitioners have taught me to intervene during times of the body's crisis, especially but not only in its disease and disability and aging, in its terminal illness and in its last days towards death, when much of the necessary repair work arises within the ailing person's family and community relationships as much as within the internal body itself, stages during which I try to fulfill as many of these folkloric functions as possible and during which my work is to move that person and her/his social relations towards education, reconciliation, peace, enlightenment and self-understanding. My liberational death-work thus involves the release of personal fear and regret, via practices such as the counseling of family and friends, the training and teaching of younger community members in performing this work, and the reorienting of cultural practitioners (such as university faculty) towards ethical frameworks that facilitate healing, including those of social justice and various spiritual traditions. I am the person who gets consulted when family and friends experience these trying moments in life, who proffers the difficult community labor of helping people handle "big picture" questions of living and death.

This work has recently taken me to join my University's Compassion Hui, a community and college consciousness-raising and policy-making alliance that focuses on mental health issues among campus faculty, students, and staff, as well as in the larger community, at a time when high-profile "active shootings" and celebrity suicides have punctuated the news landscape of the nation. This organization, headed by UH Mānoa Department of English faculty Susan Schultz, organizes to get UHM administrators to

formulate more thoughtful and compassionate bureaucratic procedures to handle student self-harm, faculty/staff/student depression and stress, information surrounding the death of campus community members, and the overall morale and empathy levels of our institutional culture/s. Our major objective: to get the University of Hawai'i Mānoa, and UH-system colleges in general, to think through policies related to their community members' deaths. Of course in addition to policy, we keep track of how mental health issues are represented in the symbolic ecology of mass media. Since horror modes that engage with death, illness, and trauma do not occur only within explicitly horror-categorized televisual texts, I watch for the ways these things are portrayed in shows foreground other genre mixes, as well.

On the surface, the *Lethal Weapon* film series seems to play up Riggs' depressive-suicidal "madness" very problematically: the four movies present his disease as a charming tactical, if unpredictable, advantage whenever the duo face dangerous villains. This contrasts with the TV show which appears to depict the character's emotional problems seriously, using the longform medium to add background to his character that never arises in the cinematic versions. Framing the character's three tours of duty in the US armed forces overseas as the historical context for Riggs snapping after his wife and child's fatal car crash in Texas, the pilot's narrative implies that this family accident triggered Riggs's military trauma into his current self-destructive behavior. However, as a three-decade *Lethal Weapon* viewer, I find that this narrative strategy does not work. No matter how respectfully Miller and his writers room trudge through episodic beats that expose how Riggs and his late wife had loved each other, how his military service had been wracked by traumatic encounters (such as seeing his best friend's head blown off, an admission he inappropriately lets slip to the Murtaugh teenagers), how this PTSD has sculpted him into a gritty and gruff (but inevitably likable) foil for the cautious Roger, etc., I tend to agree with Trenholm: something is missing compared to the original (first) film. And that something has to do with who's in charge of the writing: the showrunner Miller, I feel, lacks an intimate, intuitive grasp of the complexity that is mental illness.

The deeper origin of Riggs's emotional makeup lies in the complicated psychological background of original *Lethal Weapon* film scriptwriter Shane Black, whose spec screenplay for the first franchise-founding movie broke sales records, even as the young film-MFA-program student challenged not only the script form—inserting now-famous, funnily self-aware asides which broke standard screenplay rules for “objective” action description—but

also the creative-industry labor position of all screenwriters working in the late twentieth-century Hollywood film market. During the 1980s and 1990s, Black made headlines in industry trades by competing with fellow star scripter Joe Eszterhas, an older Hungarian American journalist (whom I'll address later in this chapter), to procure that era's top compensation for movie screenplays. Black and Eszterhas broke ground as the first non-directing screenwriters in the history of Hollywood to be recognized by the general public as high-earning auteurs of their own movie brands. Though monetarily successful and recognized as a film artist, however, Black has also spoken in interviews with pop-culture magazines about being deeply depressed during his teenage years as an unhappily participating gridiron player. Forced into athletics by his alpha-male father, a former high-school football star, Black, a macho-sports-hating, *Star-Trek*-loving, classic *noir*-novel-and-film addicted otaku, often spent all night before key high-school games praying to God that He get rid of football, his OCD driving him to etch grooves into the floor of his bedroom with a coin, as part of this religious ritual of making deals with the deity. The depression and self-hatred turned into drug-fueled partying during his initial run at Hollywood stardom, a time of heady success as the twenty-something student became the highest-paid scripter in the business, a star writer whose famous string of action films included one with a notable inciting incident of a football player being forced by criminals to shoot the team quarterback on the playing field (1991's *The Last Boy Scout*, starring a much younger Wayans, Jr., and Bruce Willis, lead performer of the *Die Hard* movies, the *Lethal Weapon* films' rival franchise). As a Black aficionado and critical consumer of the action genre, I am always reminded that the *Lethal Weapon* movies, despite their casual explosions, violent combat, and serial-slaying gunwork, are actually about two disabled cops: the middle-aged one who, in the movie franchise's most repeated line which we fans love to quote, is "too old for this shit," and the mentally ill, traumatized one who threatens self-harm on a regular basis.

In Black's celebrated script for the first film in 1987, the twists and whammies involving Riggs are truly scary and disturbing. The cop's regular playing of Russian roulette in his forlorn widower's trailer home where he drinks himself to death, his impulsively hurtling off of a building after handcuffing to himself a depressed would-be jumper whom he is supposed to be "talking down," etc., always feel to me emotionally real, complicated, consequential. Riggs' perspective as the movies' primary protagonist—echoing Black's committedly noirish worldview in which violence and corruption constantly threaten human

relationships in the city—lends a dark credibility to an otherwise escapist genre action film. Perhaps this was also in part because in the movie series, Riggs had been played by former star Mel Gibson, himself no stranger to mental illness or unstable behavior as documented in a series of PR-disastrous personal events in the early 2000s, which have been covered extensively by entertainment-industry gossip sites that reported on Gibson's notorious drunken rant against Jews during a lawsuit-engendering police arrest, his terroristic and racist-misogynist threatening of an immigrant ex-girlfriend, his long public record of homophobic remarks, etc. Some of these industry gossip blogs got their news from former Black rival Eszterhas, who late in his career worked with Gibson as fellow Catholics creating a Christian-Jewish film project about the Maccabees, and who as a result of that traumatic writing experience exposed in his digital autobiography, *Heaven and Mel*, the extent to which the former A-list star's emotional problems interfered, frighteningly and viscerally, with his business partnerships as well as revealed that performer's insistence on including elaborate torture scenes within his movies, especially for his own roles.⁹ But when I now review the first *Lethal Weapon* film, trying to distinguish Black's script-specific contributions from Gibson and Glover's excellent (if scarily believable, in the former case) performances, the writer's twists and whammies hold their own narratively, even thirty years from my initial viewing. As I study the TV version's parallel plot turns, they seem *de rigueur* and sanitized, their sheer predictability (an argument during a heist! a car chase!) so weak that they can be snuffed out by something as stupid as the Apple Watch's visuals and sounds which overlap with these twists and whammies—as if the producers have ceded too much power over to their sponsor, not co-authoring the commercial cross-media scenes well, not holding out for the integrity of the story world in general.

Though I want to blame showrunner Miller, whose writing room seems unaware of how to write a mentally ill, tortured character from the inside as opposed to merely theoretically (however empathetically), the person to whom I attribute most of the blame for the pilot fiasco is co-executive producer Dan Lin, Taiwanese-born, Harvard-educated CEO whose Lin Pictures produces the show for Fox network. For *Lethal Weapon*'s coarse but inventive product placement strategy, innovative, blatant, yet narratively ineffective, bears his signature style as a risk-taking, form-challenging, filmmaking executive. This act of blame surprises me with an accompanying feeling of personal disappointment; I want so much to believe in the power of immigrant producers and CEOs of color, of female studio heads and

black development executives, of LGBTQ (if white-male) showrunners, of the political meaningfulness of demographic diversity among the ranks of the managerial and professional class of corporate audiovisual storytelling. But my employment history informs me that formal innovation and leadership diversity might not necessarily equal social justice or even simply meaningful art, especially in the predatory hunting grounds of global mass-media capitalism. I realize that I've empathized with Lin, visionary co-developer and funder of "new" corporate story worlds such as the inventive *Lego* film and TV franchise (2014-present), because he resembles the peers I had encountered in my twenties as I journeyed among pre-professional networks of the UHM (former) College of Business Administration (CBA) and (then) School of Hawaiian, Asian, and Pacific Studies (SHAPS). Students of capitalism and Asian area studies, these Hawai'i-raised Asian Americans and Asian 1.5-generation immigrants earned a US university degree on their way to evolving into a transnational class of corporate executives and professionals, multilingual and international experts at management and marketing who seemed to migrate with ease from the US to Europe to the "Pacific" rim, eventually taking their place among the lower levels of the global ruling class especially in Asia's Newly Industrializing Economics (NIES). I first associated with this cohort of future managers as an international business student participating in the CBA's Field Study of Asian Industrialization, a summer program of the Pacific Asian Management Institute (PAMI) that toured us for weeks across the factories and business headquarters and US consulates of various NIES, where we witnessed how the modern East Asian state had partnered with its nation's manufacturing industries in a new political-economic relationship meant to mimic the industrial policy of Japan when it performed a "miraculous" postwar rise from the ashes back to neocolonial hegemony over the Pacific and Asian region. The PAMI field study and SHAPS BA in Asian studies linked me to similar demographics of educated professionals of color when I moved to Tokyo, largely "local" Asians who had gone through SHAPS's language and cultural programs and Asian Americans trained in Japanese culture through Cold War-era area studies on the US continent, new peers during my time as a business and financial journalist. I encountered many Asian Americans and Asian diasporic business people, lower-level executives, sales and IT specialists, start-up entrepreneurs and venture capitalists, stock analysts and researchers, industrial science and engineering managers, and reporters like me who collectively were positioned within their labor markets as a managerial-professional layer of workers. These

midlevel brokers of financial and scientific power who moved throughout the world constituted a group that I came to nickname the transnational middle class of global capitalism. Lin had once belonged to this class, working his way up the Warner Brothers empire as a midlevel development executive, before he made the bold move of forming Lin Pictures, his effort towards exiting the managerial-professional status *en route* to true upper-class membership.

And this is what the sociological literature suggests about such transnational managers and professionals. As members of a broader professional-managerial class, they do not own the means of production within corporate capital. That is, they do not occupy longstanding CEO positions within these conglomerates' highest-ranked firms; or hold associated and prestigious board memberships in the thicket of interlocking company directorates; or possess massive amounts of stock related to such high-status positions. However, this upper-middle-class demographic has wielded what analytical Marxist Eric Wright theorizes as a strong degree of workplace authority that has gifted them with limited control over company institutional resources (2003). Wright views the corporate managerial-professional class as placed into a contradictory socioeconomic position, neither clearly bourgeoisie nor proletariat, but evincing the structural characteristics of each.¹¹ In my mid-twenties, turning down entry into UHM law school, I rejected the long-term plan of becoming an international business attorney moving towards corporate law and instead worked in journalism as a transition into writing and editing work within the precarious labor markets of academia, choosing not to rise further towards this class position, myself.

Lin reminds me of a female colleague from the CBA East Asian field study who remains one of my longtime BFFs. An overachieving Punahou graduate, she and I competed for top grades among our Pacific Asian Management Institute cohort but gradually bonded when we participated in the CBA's international student marketing organization (AIESEC) as chapter cofounders during our business undergraduate years. Both Lin and she were raised in part by Asian-national parents who had out-migrated to the US, raising bicultural children; both graduated with undergraduate BBA degrees as multilingual middle-class Americans of color; then both procured an MBA from one of the nation's top business graduate programs alongside other equally ambitious Asian American and Asian immigrant twentysomething youth, before entering US corporate media's entry-level management track—Lin via Warner Brothers Pictures where he cut his teeth and with whom Lin Pictures

would contract its current development deal; my friend with Hallmark Cards, Inc., where she now manages, develops, and evaluates product lines as a data analytics executive in their Kansas City headquarters. When I saw the original *Legø* film (2014) produced by Lin Pictures, I was amazed by how unapologetically, yet how joyfully, this clearly commercial project—its story world is after all comprised of the branded universe based on a kiddie toy set—used postmodern storytelling techniques to deliver a surprisingly moving tale about the nature of children’s imagination, played out on the big screen with charm and wit. I had subsequently marked Lin as someone to watch, who seemed to put together projects that balanced commerce and art in fresh ways, similar to that college friend, a highly creative businesswoman who ushers her imaginative skills towards assessing how corporate art might best be developed and delivered for the greeting-card marketplace. But I also should admit that Lin reminds me a little of myself: of my time employed in the global communications industry as one different from the white-male (or in the region in which I worked, East Asian-male) occupational norm among the labor sector of journalism’s managerial-professional class, as one who combined social difference together with professional excellence in ways meant to inextricably link these two traits in the fast-moving media labor market. It is a period upon which I do not often reflect, except the lasting impression it made on my foundational assumptions about corporate media. One: never buy into media’s self-portrait or presentation of itself, because so much of that depiction involves “spin” (my “not the obvious story” subtheme). Two: mass media inevitably intersects with organized criminality (my heretofore unstated “Hearst/Murdoch rule” which I will expand on later in this monograph). Three: as a result of (1) and (2), critical media literacy and critical political economy are thus priority knowledge sets for any scholar and especially for any producer who hopes to engage mass media, forming a necessary baseline for ethical and informational survival. And four: like the international exchange students in marketing and management whose homestay placements and Honolulu workplace internships my friend and I had planned locally and coordinated internationally through the CBA’s ties to global business colleges during our AIESEC years, the managerial and professional workers employed within this (our) transnational class are, however relatively privileged, still ultimately labor, still interchangeable, moveable, and replaceable within the circuitous cogs of the capitalistic machine.

I think of these lessons and life stories when considering what it means to write TV during this very confusing digital century, in this particular historical moment where social media and ICT platforms can be marshaled as easily towards fascism and empire as they can towards social and economic justice, collective grassroots expression, and reparations for historical oppression. How does one in such thoroughly corporate contexts produce televisual work that might be spiritually auratic (as Walter Benjamin would say), culturally authentic (as every Birmingham CCCS scholar from Richard Hoggart to Stuart Hall to Paul Willis onward might say), or reflecting community knowledge of “alternative modernities, resources of hope, new dynamics in social movements” that often become erased in the teleological “Digital-Age v. everyone else who’s ‘left behind’” narratives of digital-era discourse (as alternative-media scholar Faye Ginsburg has said: 2008, 141)? What does it mean to nurture, create, and distribute televisual and “post-television” stories, especially as a member of that powerful potentiality of diverse populations that could ally themselves against global capitalism, a potentiality which autonomous Marxists Hardt and Negri have ambiguously labeled “the multitude” of this millennium? Hardt and Negri conceptualize the multitude as a new socio-economic category around which resistance can form, replacing the working class’s hegemonically “revolutionary” position within nineteenth- through twentieth-century Marxist traditions, in ways that do not force progressives into choosing “between unity and plurality.” Instead of the single subjectivity of the proletariat, the two scholars view a diverse wave of social classes that now rise in new collective struggles against capital’s omnipresent worldwide empire (103-104). In this movement, urban industrial-wage labor loses its exclusive status at the center of class struggle, as feminist and postmodern forms of work get recognized as equally productive labor activities and thus legitimate bases for political resistance. These new labor forms include domestic “reproductive” work of women and immigrants; survivance efforts of the globe’s rural and poor populations, tough daily work that might not display in business-industrial sector or state employment data; and Hardt and Negri’s immaterial labor (including knowledge labor, affective labor, and the imaginative labor of which I write) which I outlined in the previous chapter. These scholars’ notion of the multitude teases me with its optimistically collective vision yet frustrates with its abstract idealism: it contains “singularities that act in common”; the singularities will coalesce into the “irreducible multiplicity” of twenty-first-century humanity, as it faces new accumulation by capital; this multiplicity will thus resist the threat that all of life will become

the next enclosure to be privatized/commodified and that all life forms become subsumed into “the becoming common of labor” (105). The concept of the multitude thus redefines the struggle for an age in which capitalism extends its biopolitical tentacles to all forms of labor, all human activities, all forms of life (105); the multitude encompasses, envelops, and extends to innumerable types of labor that are compelled to work together, collaborating on the common political project of finding solidarity against their exploitation by the rule of capital (106). Under this multitudinous model, the implications of previous, twentieth-century theorizations of the global division of labor, such as those from the world-systems and dependency perspectives, do not hold much sway. Like political-economic media researcher Hasmondhalgh, who as I mentioned in Chapter 2 maps out a complex ICT field of production where small contractors, medium-sized firms, and large corporations might network in unpredictable alliances and deals that call for historically specific analyses, Hardt and Negri emphasize that we researchers should not assume fixed, hierarchical divisions of labor, so much as assess the various ways that diverse types of labor might communicate, collaborate, and “become common” (107) aka ally with each other’s particular interests and struggles at specific conjunctures. To me, Hardt and Negri seem to be saying that as capitalism attempts to dominate the life world, including leisure, social relationships, and our very human ideas and dreams, expanding the modern workplace to the entire biopolitical sphere of life and extending the factory system towards the production of this life itself, we local denizens of the life world gain the political opportunity to penetrate companies, firms, and corporations; then confuse, inoculate against, and humanize them from the inside, however temporarily and imperfectly; and for brief if highly contingent moments, even unearth and re-animate life in places long claimed by capital, those rigid realms of profit and privilege, homogenization and standardization. Ever a science fiction nerd, I want so much to buy into that utopian vision.

I have to admit, however, struggling with the idea of multitude. Perhaps it’s the old-school “vulgar” Marxist in me, that staunchly economic analyst and trenchant disbeliever in postmodernism, ever tracing financial and labor hierarchies, following the money, noting the predictable impact of institutional flows of power upon social outcomes. How does the multitude account for the gross and persistent inequalities historically produced by colonialism? For indigeneity, diverse life worlds that insist on remaining outside of the brutal modernist timescape of capital? For regionality, the thousands of local anarchistic energies

that transform global capital into/through community forms such as cultural transfers of resources and reciprocal production relations? For political and economic structure, threatening alliances which dare to challenge historic power formations? But Hardt and Negri's concept, I also allow, energizes my thinking process, as I stretch my political imagination to include among its diversity database even upper-class screenwriters such as disabled writer and recent *Iron Man 3* (2013) and *Predator 4* (2018) blockbuster director Black, as well as screen writers such as Taiwanese-corporate-elite-born, Asian diasporic producer Lin, among this scholar's personal "scripting multitude." It also, I realize not unselfishly, positions someone like me, a lower-middle-class scholar from two families of upper-middle-class merchants, among its legions. Planning my post-doctoral future—for which "Plan A" is accessing that competitively in-demand, nationally sought after, and thus not immediately likely tenure-track academic position, and "Plan B" is "repatriate back to that corporate managerial-professional class which offers more actual agency than a lifetime of financially unstable, limited-autonomous labor as a university adjunct"—I ponder the life stories of immigrants, women, and non-normative "others," screen writers who have impacted the TV industry in formal and thematic ways that I consider ideologically or discursively contributory to anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist community struggles. For if it is to be Plan B, returning to the unethical, criminal, avaricious world of corporate mass media, I want to be ready—armed with critical knowledge about the nature of the political work that needs to be done in order to author meaningful teleplays.

Genre Innovation And The Corporate-Auteurist Function Of Multitudinous "Others"

Another night in, and my husband and I view *Die Another Day* (2002) from a film-series regularly rotating on our Blu-Ray machine: Bond, James Bond. We can't help it: we're late-Cold-War babies, socialized into US cinematic culture during the 1970s, already fully formed filmgoers in our tweens by the time Lucas' *Star Wars* (1977) had marked the historic start of the science fiction-action movie-blockbuster trend that survives to today. But "blockbuster franchise" in our lizard brains will first and foremost mean the 007 series, which has worked its madness/magic into our insides from an earlier point, our Hawai'i childhood. From the late 1960s onward, our *Nisei* fathers—a working-class hotel busman and taxi driver for my husband and a middle-class realtor, billiards hall owner, and baker for me—made their elementary-school-aged children view the TV-broadcast versions of the

Bond films, then dragged those kids along to the neighborhood theater to catch the latest installment of the adventures of this MI-6 assassin granted license to kill by queen and country. We possess two complete sets of the 24-film series (1962-present), one on DVDs and this Blu-Ray set, and have watched each movie at least 15 times in our lives, about 10 viewings of which have been as a couple. Tonight, though, with Bond #20, a special disc loaded with “extras,” we play an unusual game of authorship. My husband, remembering my scholarly interest in Tamahori, recalls right after the film’s ending that one extra is a director-producer audio track. We restart the disc for viewing number 16, the details from our last story reception quite fresh in our memories. This time we guess, before the turned-on track reveals the answer, about which narrative contributions had been made by Tamahori, which were written into the official screenplay by regular Bond scripters Neal Purvis and Robert Wade, and which were based on decisions made by the executive-producing Broccoli half-siblings, Barbara Broccoli and Michael G. Wilson, US-educated heirs to filmmaker Albert “Cubby” Broccoli who had originally developed and produced the franchise alongside Harry Saltzman starting with 1962’s *Dr. No*. Of this producing team, only Tamahori is not a repeat “screen writer” for the Bond series; like his various employment gigs at *The Ray Bradbury Theater*, the Māori filmmaker has performed “one-shot” work-for-hire labor for this Bond entry. Unlike those TV jobs, however, at the time of his directing work, as the latest Bond film auteur handpicked by the very selective and urbane Broccolis, Tamahori slightly outranks the frequently contracted Purvis and Wade in terms of workplace authority. Thus I am curious as to what his ultimate contributions to that film text will turn out to be. He is, after all, not just the first indigenous director in the series’ decades-long history, but the first person of color to helm such a major tentpole sf-fantasy franchise, the oldest one still running. Bond claims the title of oldest running Hollywood series today, existing before the late twentieth century brought us *Star Wars* and *Jurassic Park* and the twenty-first ushered in various Marvel-Fox/-Sony superhero movies (the *X-Men* and *Spider-Man* franchises), the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy from New Line, Warner Brothers’ box-office-steamrolling *Harry Potter* series, and Marvel and DC’s cinematic universes. Tamahori arguably also constitutes the first indigenous person/person of color to shoot a big-budget franchise film, period. His employment for this movie had helped usher in an era where the below male directors from international or racial-minority backgrounds finally joined the prestigious ranks of usually US or European white-male helmers of tentpoles that enjoy budgets over \$60 million, a film-

directing elite that the fantasy factory started to diversify globally in the first decade of the twenty-first century in an effort to keep costs down and to stimulate movie marketability and profitability through fresh blood:

Tamahori's *Die Another Day* (2002) \$145 million budget

Ang Lee's *The Hulk* (2003) \$137 m

John Woo's *Paycheck* (2003) \$61 m

Alfonso Cuarón's *Harry Potter & the Prisoner of Azkaban* (2004) \$130 m

Guillermo Del Toro's *Hellboy* (2004) \$66 m

Tamahori's *xxX: State of the Union* (2005) \$87 m

Tim Story's *Fantastic Four* (2005) \$100 m

Tim Story's *Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer* (2006) \$130 m

Tamahori's *Next* (2007) \$70 m

Guillermo Del Toro's *Hellboy II: The Golden Army* (2008) \$85 m

I have suspicions on who contributed what narrative dimensions and plot details to *Die Another Day*, based on a largely unsupported idea of what might constitute an “indigenous Oceanic” sensibility within this Western spy-action blockbuster film, and so does my husband, based on an astute reading of Tamahori's cinematic language from his preceding/subsequent Hollywood movies such as *Mulholland Falls*, *The Edge*, and *Next*. I end up proven wrong about some innovations to the 007 series' formal style and thematic content in this installment which I had previously suspected came from the New Zealand director. For example, I had guessed him responsible for the narrative alteration that extends the opening scene's storyline through the iconic title credits which follow it and which mark the start of the movie's official narrative. In DAD, this opening credit roll and accompanying film theme song plays over a montage of an imprisoned Bond being tortured in a North Korean military camp—a narrative tactic never done during this title-song sequence which usually resembles a non-narrative music video. This apparently had been a collective choice made by the Broccoli siblings together with their regular writing team of Purvis-Wade rather than by the Māori filmmaker.

But both my husband and I were surprised to find that Tamahori's systematic knowledge of the franchise's venerable traditions equaled ours—which makes sense, because generationally, the Bond series had probably been his age cohort's equivalent of *Star Wars* for us, the groundbreaking movie series that knocks us over as a tween/teen so that we are

made to re-evaluate our formative ideas of film genre completely. For example, Tamahori admits to adding touches of homage to earlier films, especially *From Russia With Love* (1963), which he would have viewed, if during its global theatrical run, at 13 years old (a year older than I was when the first SW film hit theaters)—such as Bond’s enemy spies filming him and a possible female lover in his hotel room behind a one-way mirror, a glass that the super agent of course quickly shatters to expose their sneaky acts. Learning from my father to become Bond fan who devoured the Ian Fleming novels at ten years old, I loved hearing that Tamahori talked the tall and beautiful Korean American model-turned-actor, Rick Yune, into performing neo-classical Bond subvillain Zao, ultimately a higher-profile role than the one written on paper, that of the lead antagonist and Zao’s boss, the North Korean rogue Colonel Tan-Sun Moon, a higher-status part which Yune had originally desired but which Tamahori eventually granted to Yune’s fellow Korean American performer Will Yun Lee. In their script, Purvis and Wade make Moon (very problematically) pay to morph his Asian face through gene therapy into a classically Anglo American appearance, so that Moon disappears early in the film narrative, only to reappear surreptitiously in the figure of mysterious white billionaire Gustav Graves (played by the very blonde Toby Stephens) who takes up more screen time than his North Korean alter-ego. Looking back at this casting choice, I feel Tamahori had been reserving Yune’s more cinematically powerful presence for Moon’s henchman Zao, working the production so that the visually stunning performer got more screen time than his boss, as a way to signal the director’s auteurist engagement with the series’ well-known formal language. Part of this language is the pop-cultural history of memorable (if racist, heterosexist, ableist, etc.) Bondian villainy, for which the franchise is widely known. Tamahori says he utilized Yune’s striking looks by further adding a plot detail not in the written script: he “screen writes” around the official screenplay so that an explosion early in the movie now leads to Zao’s face being struck by diamond shards. That accident combined with Zao’s own facial gene therapy turn him into a freakish-looking albino giant whose cheeks brilliantly glitter with menace, a memorable onscreen image. Explaining his visual contribution to the film’s narrative through such plot minishifts and through his clever use of costume and make-up, Tamahori reflects on the artistic tradition of physically iconic Bond subvillains such as Oddjob from *Goldfinger* (1964). I got that reference immediately, because to this day, at least in spy-genre geek communities, few remember *Goldfinger* himself (the German Gert Fröbe) without some prompting, but everyone easily

recalls Oddjob (Hawai'i's Toshiyuki Sakata aka Harold Sakata aka the Olympic weightlifter "Tosh Togo"), one of the most memorable cinematic villains of the late twentieth century.

Despite the obvious whitewashing, Orientalizing, and imperialistic/xenophobic Cold-War themes within DAD's core script (the movie, after all, momentarily united North Korean and South Korean filmgoers in a protest movement against Hollywood's portrayal of their region, politics, and peoples), I admire how Tamahori aims for this level of series iconography.¹² But I am even more struck by his attention to small details which accumulate into solid Bondian artistry: the seriousness of emotional performance he insists upon for even the most rote and ridiculous action sequences written by Purvis and Wade, such as a multiple military-hovercraft chase at the film's start or a stock helicopter crash near its end, where he directs actors to perform somberly, keeping the stakes believable and audience engaged; or his just-under-campy light relief of Bond's intimate scenes with women, such as that opening title-song sequence where Tamahori insists that the Korean female prison official who tortures the secret agent with scorpion stings be dressed up in leather, pseudo-dominatrix style, which he shoots with enough of a wink to take the edge off the sequence's brutality, or the first sex scene between Bond (Pierce Brosnan) and Jinx (Halle Berry) containing footage so intense that the racier version of this DVD is available only in Europe, not the prudish US, which Tamahori choreographs vigorously, indicating that after such a long and unpleasant stay in the North Korean prison, doesn't the assassin deserve a bout of powerful and healing lovemaking? In the end, though Tamahori elegantly serves the series' formal conventions in these artistic ways, when I ask myself what the director's indigenous Oceanic, Māori contributions may be to a film text and narrative tradition so unapologetically rife with propagandizing Western empire, heteropatriarchy, and US militarism, two scenes come to mind. These are unsurprisingly the same scenes within DAD which I most responded to upon my first viewing as a Bond aficionado: the fabulous fencing sequence between Bond and Graves, taking place in Blades, a British men's club; and the infamous action scene where Bond surfs upon the tidal wave created by a melting glacier in Iceland. As fellow New Zealand filmmaker and former UHM indigenous cinema scholar Merata Mita has said in her memorable essay on Māori cinema, "The Soul and the Image" (which I cited in my discussion of Tamahori's work in Chapter 2), for these Native people of New Zealand, the advent of cinematic technology made Māori feel both moved and frightened, due to the sacred power of films as a vessel of spiritual expression. Though not

knowledgeable about Māori spirituality, I feel this pair of scenes are infused with an engaging audiovisual force at once corporeal and visceral, robbing viewers of their breath, eclipsing the limits of the Purvis-Wade script. I was not at all surprised to find that it was Tamahori's authorship of the well-reviewed fencing scene, which expanded on Purvis and Wade's written directions of using rapiers through to the end, by instead upping the blade types in order to incrementally raise the stakes. Tamahori's segmentation of the sequence into parts involved not just one set of dueling weaponry but three, selected for their increasing level of brutality and potential damage, in order to add to the rising tension. Along with many other Bond fans who consider this a landmark fight sequence in the series, I am enthralled by its low-tech nature, as the Māori director uses very few stuntmen so as to augment the bodily and emotional credibility of the battle. He makes sure to capture his actors' faces in most of the fencing/dueling moves, challenging directors like George Lucas whose production of his SW prequel trilogy during around the same era had been testing the digital waters with practices such as replacing performers' heads on stuntmen's bodies, a creative labor practice that simultaneously disrespected both types of workers and looked stupid when cut together in the film narrative. In its raw simplicity and sparsely honest ballet of male-to-male violence, Tamahori's dueling sequence made me recall the earliest Bond fight scenes in movies such as *Thunderball* (1965), cut by master editor and later series director Peter R. Hunt, who would steal the then-edgy narrative practice of jump cuts from Godardian French New-Wave cinema to import them into classic Bondian hand-to-hand combat sequences, lending them a postwar, high-modernist edge. But it also recalled the history of Hollywood action scenes—men with swords confronting their blade-wielding enemies—in ways that went back to Errol Flynn, Ronald Colman, and other performers who trained at fight choreography.

The other notable scene Tamahori has authored—this time his sole creation, as it was not in the original Purvis-Wade script at all—was the ice-glacier surfing scene. Just as my spirit feels uplifted and refreshed whenever I watch the fencing sequence, I always loathe this part of the story where Bond demonstrates his “surf” skills for the second time in the movie (the first was evading North Korean spies to get inside the nation's borders via the ocean, a sequence shot on Maui with local pro surfers). He's driving a high-tech sports car, skidding across Iceland's icy landscape to avoid pursuing villains, when Graves remotely aims a satellite-lodged laser down through the stratosphere at that speeding car, eviscerating a nearby glacial cliff into a tsunami of water. Of course, with Bond nothing is impossible, so

the screen story next reveals the agent ably balanced atop the snowboard from the earlier surf scene, his backpack strapped to a windsurfing parachute, which together glide him over and down a wave created by the tsunami. Even as a Bond fan who's seen everything in my years of suspending both ideological and commonsense belief for the series, I've had a negative reaction from my very first viewing of this sequence. It's always: "Surfing. A. Glacier. Rrrright!" However, that feeling is inevitably paired with a "Why am I so riveted by this scene, so unable to look away?" reaction. It turns out that on a different film shoot, while scouting global locations with a crew member, Tamahori had noticed majestic ice cliffs and imagined them melting like, he admits to thinking, a scene from a James Bond film—so when he got his shot at 007, he remembered this idea and imported it into the agent's glacial adventure. Today, I sense that the boldness of this scene—trying for the spectacular, failing somewhat, but still making a memorable impression that hypnotizes viewers—is an extension of Tamahori's earlier TRBT work in using nature, the planetary character, as a powerful narrative presence. Its audacity impacts my affect in bodily ways, taking my breath away even as my head works overtime trying to grasp why such a spell can paralyze me, like some kind of cinematic magic.

Tamahori's unusual status as the sole indigenous auteur and rare director of color helming big-budget fantasy during that era was possible partly because of the changing production relations of the 007 franchise. The older Broccoli heir Michael G. Wilson had originally been designated as the family's next-generation lead to transition the series through the tough 1980s, when the spy genre seemed in danger of irrelevance in the wake of the more urban, hip, profanely funny, and dramedic *Lethal Weapon* and *Die Hard* franchises led by US male characters committed to their (however at-risk) nuclear families and of the less sophisticated, more politically problematic/patriotic, yet Reagan-era-audience-friendly, Schwarzenegger/Stallone movies where protagonists proved shallow stereotypes rather than heroic archetypes. It was Wilson who initially was trained to take over the franchise from his stepfather Cubby Broccoli, co-writing Bond screenplays, selecting and mentoring new scripters for the series, unsuccessfully testing out a more serious and monogamous Bond (Timothy Dalton) positioned within a more classical structure for the films (even dramatic enough to be rated R, in the case of 1989's *License to Kill*), after the 1970s version (Roger Moore) veered too far into the direction of satire and unbelievability. But it was Barbara Broccoli, Wilson's stepsister, a cosmopolitan expatriate American who grew up largely in

Britain but who was educated in the US, who took the series into globalized production as well as transformed its narrative conventions into new genre mixes. From the 1990s, when she worked as Wilson's producing partner and rose to his coequal in running the franchise, instead of the team's regular stable of mostly British directors (John Glen, Terence Young, Guy Hamilton, Lewis Gilbert), Barbara began employing international "work for hire" helmers such as Martin Campbell (New Zealand), Marc Foster (Germany), and Roger Spottiswoode (Canada). The "British" element on the team would remain Barbara and her stepbrother, as well as Purvis and Wade, whom she originally hired for the 1999 Bond entry *The World is Not Enough* based on their ability to satirize the spy genre in their script for *Johnny English* (2003). This core team borrowed a page from Shane Black's *Lethal Weapon* by adding noirish notes to their blockbuster formula from the 1990s onward, a genre shortcut that allowed for more classy, cynical, and complex thematic content to draw progressive (i.e. relatively educated, moneyed) viewers, yet that still let the producing team retain the sexism, violence, action, and archetypal tropes and rhythms of the traditional Bond movies.

Tamahori, fresh off the 1996 noir crime drama *Mulholland Falls* and the 2001 neo-noir thriller *Along Came the Spider*, had already demonstrated a style just dramatically graceful enough, visually dynamic enough, and thematically global enough, to fit the bill perfectly. His audiovisual storytelling talent merged with the layered fantastic-and-real genre writing of Purvis and Wade—known for integrating and extrapolating the latest scientific and industrial innovations into their Bond-universe plot details and secret-agent gadgetry—to recreate the 007 brand as sophisticated and modern, keeping it intelligently science-fictional enough to appeal to commercials by expensive auto manufacturers, luxury watchmakers, higher-end IT/computer brands, and prestige liquor producers.

When I consider women producers who unusually head major film or TV production structures enough to call the shots in such genre experimentation, think about Barbara Broccoli, legal heir to her father's Bond-IP license. After all, despite its billions of dollars at the global box office and general ownership by MGM/United Artists, Bond remains essentially a family film business run by a rare female leader to shepherd big-budget action cinema. Her genealogical directive, like mine, is to thrive from the challenge of business innovation in the industrial arts, a directive handed down by the family patriarch. Raised in Queens and Long Island by Italian immigrant parents, Cubby Broccoli paved his own corporate-auteurist path among Hollywood's international European set, moving to

London in his early forties to become a fixture in UK cinema and Pinewood Studios. His first production was in every way groundbreaking, the brave and before-its-time *Trials of Oscar Wilde* (1960), a landmark queer cinema text which he made with writer-director Ken Hughes at a time when onscreen depictions of homosexuality were still strongly banned in the US and the UK, even staking the then-controversial film with his own money.¹⁴ Like powerful producer Joel Silver of *Lethal Weapon*, who recognized that a franchise—not just a single film but a whole series—could bear a co-lead of color in Danny Glover, and who would later greenlight the casting of Hawaiian-Chinese Keanu Reeves as star of the producer’s blockbuster *Matrix* series of sf-action movies—I feel that Barbara, treading very much in the shoes of her father, is essential to modernizing this oldest of Hollywood’s fantasy franchises that I’ve followed all of my life. Her contributions to the series—decreasing its dated misogyny, adding thrills of cutting-edge technological realism, making it attractive to a new generation of advertisers who court viewers from the managerial-professional class, and thus leveling-up the films’ nuance and artistry—are, frankly, politically insignificant. After all, the 007 movie series still blatantly bolsters US hegemony and UK empire, heteropatriarchal views of women (each installment rolling out a binary of “good” v. “bad” Bond girls), wasteful and environmentally harmful ICTs (fancy gadgets, supercars, etc.), and the militarization/occupation of the world’s regions (other than North America and Western Europe) into exotic tourism destinations and Global North settler colonies. But her production decisions over the franchise have been formally perceptible and extremely palpable to me as a fan.

The case of Barbara Broccoli goes against what I’ve learned from former top-earning film screenwriter Eszterhas, whose *Hollywood Animal* (2005) serves as one of the touchstones for this project. The ex-journalist’s industry memoir has long helped me map the primary difference between creative writers such as poets and novelists versus writers working for the film and TV industry. In part responsible for a collaboratively constructed story that requires tens to hundreds of millions of dollars to realize, screenwriters are required by their managerial-professional structural position to fight tooth and nail for every little thing. Eszterhas’s edgy autobiography impressed my inner political economist, as the former Hungarian immigrant, who as a poor child grew up in a ghetto community of horrifying crime and violence, a Midwestern refugee camp for Eastern Europeans new to the US, regaled his readers with tales of taking on the upper-middle-class, MBA-certified, Hollywood

studio heads over protecting the integrity of his story worlds and scripts. These money men in charge, he insists over and over, were trained in business graduate programs where they learned that short-term sales and profits should drive studio decision-making; thus, they thoroughly lack any sense of movie form, history, or function. In his loud and often public verbal (even physical, in several frightening encounters he describes with shady Creative Artists Agency power-agent Mike Ovitz, a less rapey but equally influential and bullying figure as Harvey Weinstein) conflicts with these film-studio CEOs, Eszterhas fought, he says, for all writers. Eszterhas taught me that screenwriters compete with directors for auteur status and know way more than mere producers about audiovisual storytelling. In auteurist passages such as this one, he puts both Hollywood directors and producers in their place:

Screenwriters historically have been treated like discarded hookers in Hollywood: not invited to the premieres of their own movies, cheated out of residual payments, blackballed for their political beliefs.

Many had been treated like hookers because they hooked—working as the lawyer-turned-successful-screenwriter Ron Bass said, “to serve the director’s vision.” As far as I was concerned, the vision was mine and the director was there to serve it: to translate my vision to the screen. (14)

My favorite memoirist of Hollywood’s seedy underside thus discredits all producers on the basis of their business, rather than formal, tactics of film production. Eszterhas despises one-time A-list screenwriters such as Ronald Bass, who according to the Hungarian scripter do not just kiss the ass of development and producing executives, but who exploit would-be writers, notoriously using their underpaid labor as “assistants” in his own Bass-branded factory of scriptwriting services.¹⁴ Eszterhas, who for a long time refused to start his own production company and tended to work alone except for longstanding friendships with directors such as Paul Verhoeven (*Robocop*, *Total Recall*) and Richard Marquand (*Return of the Jedi*) who adapted his scripts into memorable cinematic noir like *Showgirls* and *Jagged Edge*, Eszterhas, the union Democrat who would later de-evolve into a libertarian Republican, does not trust power to hold back abuse in unequal organizational structures. However, I feel that Barbara’s measured organization of work roles has proven key to her voguish “translation” of the Broccoli producing vision in order to carry out the family legacy. Like many female executives in Hollywood’s highly sexist studios, networks, financing and development firms, and production companies, Barbara Broccoli did not enjoy the luxury of

leaving knowledge of film artistry behind in her embrace of the industry's profit orientation. She curated talent such as Purvis-Wade and Tamahori, and continued to work with her stepbrother to twice reboot Bond's generic blend in the millennium, keeping it fresh even after challenges arose from the rival *Bourne* film series and various superhero franchises. For example, after the noir remix, she added *film verite*/direct cinema sparseness to the series' shifting genre language, in the wake of the Jason Bourne spy trilogy's long and tight, Go-Pro-style tracking shots, that follow a parkour-practicing protagonist who flits across the tops of buildings, Spiderman-like (the sport of parkour being derived from Peter Parker, the wallcrawler's alter ego). *Casino Royale* (2006), Barbara's last significant Bond reboot which brought in Daniel Craig as the new 007, showcased Craig sliding over rooftops and construction cranes in an extended parkour sequence in pursuit of an Ugandan subvillain, as well as more artsy screenwriting, as she and Wilson started to pair Purvis-Wade with Academy-Award-winning scripters such as Paul Haggis (*Crash*) and John Logan (*12 Years a Slave*; from Chapter 2) and with award-winning British playwrights John Hodge and Jez Butterworth.

As a screenwriting scholar who has been personally impressed by the female Broccoli's contributions to the Bond formula, I wish to focus on women producers of genre who sharpen their business savvy by making their way through the competitive, masculinist movie and TV management ranks. They have learned well how to pair fantastic modes with other narrative traditions in order to identify, nurture, and expand new audience demographics. But I am equally influenced by how Eszterhas has credited his own multitudinous status as working scripter from an immigrant, Eastern European background to the invisible history of ethnic-white creative labor in directing, producing, performing, and writing that reaches back to before Hollywood's classical era. Eszterhas name-checks his specific genealogy of Hungarian immigrant workers in the film business, originally a poor community of industrial artists whose labor has been overlooked by auteur-theory-driven French New Wave critics from the postwar era onward. To me, when he mentions the ways that these earlier workers were degraded by racist jokes common in the film business, which I'm guessing were made by Anglo and other Western European Americans who held negative stereotypes of Hungarians, Eszterhas also speaks to the racialized and classed ways that the history of film authorship has been written.¹⁵ Auteur theory in the 1950s and 1960s conceptualized credit for innovation in classical cinema in favor of English, German,

French, and sometimes Russian descended directors who allegedly possessed a distinct, praiseworthy authorial style that the Eastern Europeans were assumed to have lacked. The quiet subtext of cinematic auteur theory is that Western European American filmmakers—John Ford, Alfred Hitchcock, William Wyler, Douglas Sirk, and the like—rose above the structural dictates of the Hollywood sausage factory, to create not standardized product (made by Eastern European “others” including directors and also crew) but surprisingly idiosyncratic art with an identifiable personal signature. In reaction to this discourse, Eszterhas responds in his memoir with a proud and substantial lineage of business-oriented, formally inventive creative work by Hungarians and Hungarian Jews, including Thomas Ince (the man who first put films on a Fordist assembly line, helping create Hollywood as an institution), Joe Pasternak (MGM executive who served as Louis B. Mayer’s right hand to evolve the “classical” musical genre), the Korda Brothers, Michael Curtiz (director of *Casablanca* and other classical-era cinematic gems), Bela Lugosi, Tony Curtis, Ernie Kovacs, the Gabor sisters, among others (26). Eszterhas’ most effective scripts do indeed reinvent genre in “visionary” ways that he wishes others would recognize and value in his writing. *Basic Instinct* (1992) updates Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* and older noir works such as *Double Indemnity* for the LGBTQ era, however problematically; and my favorite of his scripts, made by British director Adrian Lyne into the critically panned but generationally embraced *Flashdance* (1983), pairs an unlikely working-class heroine, a professional welder who exotic-dances at night in her industrial town, with her career goal of becoming a celebrated ballerina, while romanced by her classy CEO boss. It is not the best piece of writing but contains powerfully quotable lines such as “If you give up your dream, you die!” (which Eszterhas says ordinary fans love citing back to him) in a weird combination of dance flick, romantic drama, sex worker biopic, and MTV music video. To me, innovation doesn’t always relate directly to quality or social responsibility. It presents surprising iterations of old matter which feel fresh, and sometimes, for we business people, this means new markets. Sometimes, it also intersects with, or feeds from, progressive social movements; but other times, it merely alters the cultural landscape to accommodate new expression. Tamahori speaks in his Bond DVD commentary about the Broccolis bringing in new talent for *Die Another Day*, replacing the franchise’s regular editor with Christian Warner and the regular director of photography with David Tattersall, even as the indigenous director stepped into his own historic sets of firsts by helming the spy flick. After Tamahori praises how the slow-mo “speed ramps” that

Warner chose to edit into the film text add to the quality of a suspenseful sequence, the New Zealand auteur reflects:

Christian... I believe is the first editor where it wasn't a British editor on a Bond series. It's interesting to bring someone new, like myself or Christian, into these, and David Tattersall our DP, because the crew on these are very regular crew—with costume design, special effects, second unit, all those people work on this very regularly, so it's always interesting when you introduce new blood into these. They always bring a fresh perspective in.

Since audiovisual mass-media production requires the selection then synchronization of “old” and “fresh” forms of labor, part of the artistry itself—as Barbara Broccoli teaches me—is organizing the work roles and occupational structure for the audiovisual text’s production. The other part, as Eszterhas emphasizes, involves fighting for one’s own vision and status as an auteur, often against rival claims of authorship, because if this position is not recognized one’s work loses out to the replacement labor of others. These twin poles of coordination and competition make me question how fantastic-genre expression operates in such a dynamic, pragmatically charged pedagogical environment in which production costs, time pressures, communication and personality clashes, market shifts, logistical problems, all manner of workplace abuse and addiction, and conflicting artistic egos can easily tank one’s audiovisual work. Such external conditions impact authorship, as all working screenwriters know, influencing their writing and causing the work (and writers!) harm when not arising in positive ways. While perusing my creative-writing handbooks, I come across this excerpt from Damon Knight, US Golden Age science-fiction writer and genre gatekeeper, who along with editors such as Judith Merrill institutionalized US science fiction and fantasy narrative conventions in the 1950s through 1960s through founding professional organizations such as the Science Fiction (and Fantasy) Writers Association and the creative-writing boot camps of the Milford and Clarion Workshops. In my early attempts to teach ENG 273 and ENG 313 for the UHM Creative Writing Program, I made students read passages such as this one from Knight’s *Creating Short Fiction: The Classic Guide to Writing Short Fiction* (1997), which updated his Milford/Clarion curricula into book form. Knight’s “Four Stages of a Writer’s Development” are:

Stage 1. You are writing for yourself, and your stories are essentially daydreams. They please you in a sort of narcissistic way, but they are not stories that communicate to

other people...

Stage 2. Now you are trying to break out of your shell, trying to communicate, but your stories are what editors call “trivial.” You are not ready to write a completely developed story, and you're trying to get away with half-formed ones. The rejection slips tell you that you're not succeeding.

Stage 3. You are writing complete stories, or reasonable imitations, but you are being held back by technical problems, usually weaknesses in structure or character.

Stage 4. You have solved these problems, at least well enough to get by, and now you are working at a professional level. (There are stages beyond 4, but after that, the author no longer needs help.) (10)

The solipsistic image of the isolated writer of fantastic fiction, sitting alone at his desk and slaving over his manuscript as he attempts only to please himself and these various publications’ notions of genre form, is very hard to let go. I feel like yelling at Damon Knight: I too want to work through how to communicate to others in ways not to be viewed as trivial; I would love to shed my “technical problems” by developing my story structure or characterological craft. But perhaps that’s not meant to be my story; perhaps my own screen writing will necessitate an expanded, communitarian skillset. My fantastic imagination, the ghost gut, our mercantile genealogy, queries: What kind of authorship will you embrace? While my monkey mind, the academic imagination, after a series of what the post-#MeToo feminist show *Dietland* (AMC, 2018) depicts as blackout-ish “brain zaps,” blinks back online simply to say, Whither your multitude?

Thinking Televisually: Women And Immigrant Producers Try To Diversify Tv In Its Development And Production Stages

I am thinking televisually in the settler colony of Hawai‘i, adopted home of my southern Japanese grandparents who were Kumamoto photographers and vegetable vendors and Yamaguchi fishermen and seamstresses. Honolulu for me hosts *Nisei* ghosts, especially of my parents’ Americanized male siblings who had been “disruptors,” merchants who fomented structural economic shifts through innovation. Innovation hasn’t always implied good things, ethically or socially, for our lines. For my maternal side, innovation meant subsuming Japanese folkloric culinary forms such as bentō or kakigōri, then commodifying them into box lunches and shave ice for our plate-lunch empire—downtown on Hotel

Street, Ala Moana beach park by Magic Island, Mānoa near UHM, Waikīkī in the bandstand—before McDonald’s and other US-continental fast-food chains wiped out our kind (except for Zippy’s!), motivating us to evolve the commercial tourism landscape by catering dinner shows for which we advantaged the high volume of mainland visitors in the post-statehood islands. For my paternal side, innovation meant inventing what historians George Cooper and Gavan Daws have nicknamed “land and power” (1990s) patterns of US political-economic empire: the bureaucratically violent stage of primitive accumulation of Native Hawaiian land into Western private property, through the occupation of Hawaiian-land-trust board seats and of Legislative and other US settler-state elected positions, so as to deploy legal and financial technologies to transform Native ancestral lands into fee-simple property to be gobbled up by the settler-controlled real estate and development industries, all in the name of the “common local man.” This accumulative technology had been developed in the postwar period by my father’s brother who (as he’s confessed to me) taught it to his Japanese American (JA) veteran crew, a network of forward-thinking Maui realtors who were mostly former members of decorated US military units such as the 442nd Regimental Combat Team and the 100th Battalion. Together with their JA veteran peers across the Territory, these men had used their GI bills from World War II to attend college, run for office as Democrats, and take over the local settler state in a so-called revolution that seemed to rid the islands of its plantation economy but that which further denationalized and dispossessed Native Hawaiians from a central part of their heritage, history, spirituality, and family (i.e., ancestral lands), a moderate management shift within the US settler-colonial structure of the islands (that is: from European to Asian American rule) which also entrenched the region deeper into the global world system as a dependent service economy. I think of these uncles: my mother’s “plate lunch” brother, Waikīkī food entrepreneur who once proudly regaled me with a tale of how he had helped fellow JA settler Robert Iwamoto Sr. (grandfather of transgender politician Kim Coco Iwamoto), founder of tourism transportation giant Roberts Hawai‘i, successfully stave off unionization of a Roberts dinner-cruise ship which our firm had catered; my father’s “land and power” brother who once whispered to me that during the height of the McCarthy era, he and other union lawyers for the ILWU had borne the stigmatized label of “communist,” as their mentors and close friends had been charged for treason as the notorious “Hawai‘i Seven,” aka “Stalin’s Angels,” a local non-entertainment-industry version of the Hollywood Ten.¹⁶ I think of my

parents, average ungreedy kind people whose vocational degrees had once led to a lower-middle class life but who wound up in their elderly years employed in tourism's wage economy, in large part because they were more compassionate than their brothers and thus completely awful at capitalism. And despite my intellectual training that includes three decades of tested-and-true Marxism, I absolutely know that my dream has been to be better than them at it, this ferocious and avuncular game of capital. Not for the first time, I run a credibility self-check: why the inexplicable fondness for the factory, the neighborhood shop, the continental franchise, the global metropolitan headquarters? It is as if some yōkai, some otherworldly agent, had stapled the silhouette of my spirit across the breadth of these gargantuan circuits of production and consumption, long before I entered screaming in the Queen's Medical Center maternity ward. "If you give up your dream, you die!" I hear Eszterhas shout. The maternal uncle's statement, the clearest explication of my settler identity passed down from both lines, echoes: "We are merchants, and we are always political." Intuitively, somehow I trust in this statement. We use economic technologies as survival methods, as colonial weapons, as pathways to the future. But the direction of my families' movement has been shaped by each generation's political imaginaries. And while at a DNA-deep level, I neither trust corporations nor unions, whose ideals are only as righteous as the social-institutional arrangements persisting within, I value my political vision, nourished by years of industrial investigations and stubbornly agentic expression. That vision is fabulist and funny and fierce.

I am thinking televisually in this settler colony, and—ha!—watching TV. This particular episode of Sundance Network's docuseries of creative-industry interviews, *Close Up with the Hollywood Reporter* (2015-present), is two years old, but it remains in our DVR because I like season 2's line-up of "Drama Showrunners": men of color show creators John Ridley (from Chapter 2) and Sam Esmail (*Mr. Robot*); British (if Conservative) storytelling institution Julian Fellowes (*Downton Abbey*); former studio development/production executive and current TV/film producer Nina Jacobson (*The People v. O.J. Simpson: American Crime Story*); and feminist showrunning auteurs Marti Noxon (*UnREAL*) and Melissa Rosenberg (*Jessica Jones*). Though a lover of Noxon's recently debuted show *Dietland* (mentioned earlier in this chapter) as well as Rosenberg's adroit screenplay adaptations of the *Twilight* novels for the film series (2008-2012), I am rewatching to update my knowledge of Jacobson, who of the US writers and producers at the table, most

represents Hollywood hegemony. A manager at Joel Silver's Silver Pictures around the time it transitioned from producing the first Lethal Weapon and Die Hard to their sequels, then moving through the executive revolving door at Universal Pictures, Dreamworks SKG, and Disney, this tough Jewish lesbian film producer, born in the same year as me, has been around the block. Like other female ex-development and -production executives who quit (or were fired from) the studios before creating their own companies of her generation—especially Sarah Timberman (*Elementary*, *Masters of Sex*) and Amy Pascal (the 2017 *Ghostbusters*, *Spider-Man: Homecoming*)—she followed in the footsteps of fellow film/TV studio CEO peers such as Stacy Snider, Gail Berman, Kathleen Kennedy, Laura Ziskin, Laurie MacDonald, Hannah Minghella, and Channing Dungey, who had to find their own way through a sharply uneven corporate playing field, as well as in the paths of earlier female executives who had braved Hollywood's hyper-masculine executive ranks at a time when women rarely breached those levels of workplace authority, including Dawn Steel, Julia Phillips, and Sherry Lansing. I initially took note of Jacobson late in summer 2006, during her very public business break-up with mentee M. Night Shyamalan after the then-Disney executive had guided the talented writer-director of color through the production of his first four mainstream movies, the generally well-received art-horror hits *The Sixth Sense*, *Signs*, *Unbreakable*, and *The Village*. The implosion of their partnership was not just glaringly documented in the Indian American auteur's biography *The Man Who Heard Voices; Or, How M. Night Shyamalan Risked His Career on a Fairy Tale* (2006), especially in reporter Michael Bamberger's painstakingly detailed account of how Jacobson's alternating bouts of confusing miscommunication and unfortunately timed honesty with Shyamalan had led to his transporting his next project, the urban-fantasy film *The Lady in the Water* (2006), over to Warner Brothers, effectively ending his long relationship with the Mouse House. But I have nursed an old suspicion that the Bamberger book, timed to be released right as that movie exhibited in theaters, undoubtedly led to Jacobson's firing—while in the hospital on maternity after the birth of Jacobson and her partner's third child—by her powerful male bosses, something I have long felt was not a coincidence considering how Bamberger's overly enthusiastic depiction of the previously opaque auteur had backfired. The book's release notoriously tanked Shyamalan's career for almost a decade afterwards, lending immediate poor word-of-mouth to the film's reception and long-term popular abhorrence for his next few films (*The Happening*, *The Last Airbender*, *After Earth*), as all of LA and much

of the US snuck an inside glimpse into the Asian American director who was revealed as—surprise, surprise—egotistical, insecure, idiosyncratic, and controlling, typical white-male auteurist traits but unforgivable in a hit Hollywood filmmaker of color born in Asia.¹⁷ Though part of me will always be upset at how Shyamalan, once heralded as the heir to Spielberg and Hitchcock due to his signature suspenseful storytelling, was dropped like a hot potato by the racist US media sector once the curtain was pulled aside and everyone heard that—shocker—he talked to himself and heard intuitive voices (again, a not-unusual set of traits for autodidactic artists), I’ve often also speculated as to why few entertainment reporters linked the book’s widely read revelations to Jacobson’s sudden layoff and replacement by a white-male peer (despite her recent contract renewal with Disney) around the time of the Bamberger book’s release.¹⁸ Though at the time I had condemned her for not being able to honor properly her relationship with Shyamalan—which I had read as a possible function of her white privilege and ethnic prejudice—I also remember wondering how she had adapted to this obvious “glass cliff” experience with her white-male Disney colleagues. A glass cliff is a post-glass-ceiling form of upper-level workplace gender inequality where female executives become both the first to take on difficult organizational tasks that male peers are not likely to accept—e.g., mentor a severely skillful but temperamental filmmaker of color in the racially unequal market of urban-fantasy/horror moviemaking—but also the first to be let go for even the slightest management mistake (i.e., for example, miss that filmmaker’s original deadline for giving feedback to his latest script then offer blunt criticism in ways that he feels disrespects his artistic talent). So I have been reconsidering Jacobson over the years, registering her post-Disney self-empowering action of starting up Color Force, her production company which has overseen the filmmaking of both the *Hunger Games* (2012-2014) and the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* film franchises (2010-2017), mostly wondering what it’s like to be a white female executive processing one’s own ethnocentrism while producing 1.5 generation immigrant artists and simultaneously dealing with a sexist collegial work environment.

Watching *The Hollywood Reporter* roundtable led by that industry magazine’s TV editor Lacey Rose, I wonder if I will find Jacobson annoying in this docuformat, if she is in fact the less-than-thoughtful executive whom I had judged all those years ago for messing up Disney’s relationship with Shyamalan. Her “turn” at speaking comes after that of other show creators whose comments reveal them as critically aware of the role that Peak TV plays in

telling sociopolitically meaningful stories. The first is Egyptian American IT otaku Esmail, whose firm commitment to the color-blind casting of an Egyptian (specifically, Coptic-Greek) American lead (Rami Malek) in his techno-psychological thriller *Mr. Robot* (USA, 2015-present) proves the first of many layered efforts at social responsibility in forming the cyber-thriller's story world. Rose's opening question seems to inquire to what degree these show creators' series have been based on personal experience, but its hidden implications involve authenticity of representation. Esmail hails socially from the subterranean world of coders, hackers, and other computer specialists, so he doesn't just face challenges of racial-ethnic portrayals but also needs to be responsible for cultural depictions of his otaku community peers. He addresses the issue of social responsibility dead-on, as an artistic challenge, not separate from the issue of storytelling form:

The thing that I'm scared about is are we showing it in an authentic way...Is it going to land with people, or is it going to feel exploitive? But I think it's always important to bring that; I mean, if you're not saying something, then what's the point? You know what I mean? ... So I'm basically scared every episode, because I think every episode, we've tried to say something about something. But I was always nervous that people were going to take it the wrong way or we didn't do our jobs in articulating our point well enough. But I always loved taking the risk anyway.

Here Esmail doesn't distinguish artistic from business risks: reception dimensions include both audience responses and ratings, which will help him measure the success of his formal narrative techniques. The show then displays an episode clip where Malek's protagonist, the hacker revolutionary Elliot Alderson, sees a woman on his subway with a copy of the futuristic dystopian YA novel *The Hunger Games*. Here Esmail and his writers room force viewers to reflect upon the escapist function of twenty-first-century science fiction and fantasy texts, when Elliott the secret anarchist remarks, "We all know why we do this (read SF novels). Not because *Hunger Games* books make us happy. But because we wanna be sedated. Because it's painful not to pretend. Because we're cowards. Fuck society." Alderson, a cybersecurity engineer who suffers from depression and social anxiety, seems designed to mirror the nerd audience who often are afflicted by similar forms of mental illness; Esmail and his writing room simultaneously honor them by depicting them identifiably on the small screen, yet also address their libertarian lack of ethical action with brusque immediacy. This feels like the perfect instantiation of smart Peak TV writing: promoting in-your-face self-

reflectiveness, deploying digital-age genre (cyber-thriller) to challenge neo-classical genre (science-fiction dystopia) over which can best tackle the same thematic content (i.e., economic and political alienation in a high-tech, futuristic society), and engaging multiple kinds of diversity with both political bluntness and layers of address, because of the high stakes faced by its digital-age viewership which faces the threat of exploitation by corporate data mining and oppression by governmental harassment/surveillance. I feel that *Mr. Robot* challenges conventionally genred “science-fiction” TV shows such as *The Expanse*, *Star Trek: Discovery*, and *Colony*, by creating a story world about the present or near-future instead of intermediate or far futures, much like the SF New Wave had done.

This emphasis on the social relevance of televisual content gets repeated with the next TV executive producer to speak, Noxon, whose unselfish mentoring of co-showrunner and show creator Sarah Gertrude Shapiro in their series *UnREAL* (Lifetime, 2015-present) has impressed me. Unlike other senior showrunners who might pull their superior rank with TV networks so as to take away the jobs of less experienced show creators such as Shapiro, especially in the case that their visions for the TV series they co-manage clash, Noxon, I’ve observed, seems to let Shapiro make her own mistakes, despite their fairly public fights over who’s in charge. In Shapiro’s relatively unseasoned hands, Season 2 of *UnREAL*, after a well-received first season, was a narrative mess, in spite, or perhaps because, of its well-meaning albeit second-wave-trying-to-be-third-wave feminist orientation. The dramedic series about the behind-the-scenes gender, racial, class, generational, and sexual-orientation politics of a *The Bachelor*-type reality show’s production, was originally conceived by Shapiro in her acclaimed short movie *Sequin Raze*; this had been Shapiro’s baby based on the experimental filmmaker’s own time as a production assistant on the real-life set of *The Bachelor*, a cheesy prime-time hit reality series where producers had marshaled the Cinderella myth and lots of backstage/offscreen manipulation of performers to “produce” multiple female contestants and a prince-like “good catch” of a bachelor to open themselves up to self-incriminating, scandalous, and shameful onscreen behaviors that allegedly made for great reality TV. *UnREAL* is one of several female-oriented and/or women-produced series (*Happyland*, *Jane the Virgin*, etc.) that speak back to the paratextual language of the hegemonic Disney-shaped pop-cultural “fairy tale” of a Happily Ever After (HEA) thematic voyage frequently offered to US female audiences so that they buy into a gendered consumer lifestyle of fashion, home products, and leisure.¹⁹ As such, the show works to deconstruct

the heteronormative myth of romantic love, with the writers' constant efforts at exposing the ridiculously troped reality TV competitions where women (and sometimes men) compete over who will be "the one" ultimate marital partner—mocking series such as *The Bachelor* which weaponize this fairy tale paratext against female TV audiences for ratings and for advertisers.

In the second season, Shapiro had thought it politically progressive for the storyline to offer the first black "bachelor" on reality television—first even before the real-life reality TV show where she used to work, on which this scripted series had been loosely based, would make that inclusive casting choice. At the time, such TV shows featuring romantic contests rarely allowed contestants of color to win, let alone be featured as a desired lifetime partner. The young white-feminist producer had tried to do the right thing, making much of her affirmative-action hiring of black female and male writers in the usually all-white writers room, but the season's televisual text came across as patronizing as well as overly cerebral, neither empowering of the African American characters nor typical of true intersectional feminism. Instead, the series wound up feeling like a paean to white-feminist guilt, with the young Jewish protagonist Rachel Goldberg (Shiri Appleby), an unstable reality-TV genius, committing act after insensitive act of tone-deaf liberal white women's gaffes and grossly ethnocentric ethical (sometimes illegal) violations.

I've suspected that this drop in the writing quality was because, as a newcomer to showrunning, Shapiro didn't know enough to place those African American writers in positions of power; from her press interviews, it seems she mainly used them in ways similar to cultural consultants, rather than positioning them in charge of the season's major arcs or key episodes, a tokenizing employment move. As a result, I feel, these writers of color likely did not feel free or safe in speaking their minds, as they had been both outnumbered and without the proper workplace authority to turn their cultural knowledge towards good TV, and the season's storyline ended up being a political and artistic mess. By season 3, however, there seemed to be a continued commitment to a plethora of new (as well as long-neglected earlier) black characters and/or performers, only this time, the showrunners conceptualized roles that seemed partly color-blind and partly diversity-cast, meaning their arcs were sometimes not race-related but often were affected by ethnic culture or racial prejudice, a clever combination which humanized the characters in very diverse, complex ways. The uneven, but gradually improving, seasonal quality to me exhibited the signs of good series

management that very likely involved Noxon training Shapiro and other producers instead of punishing them for their mistakes; a more conventional senior showrunner would have embraced the common male executive-producing practice of banishing Shapiro from the production and merely leaving her with show creator title. Instead, it feels to me as if Noxon has honored the project as that of a younger woman and allowed her the room of developing as an artist without being separated from her own creative work.

It's noteworthy that the series' main motif is that of older difficult women (chiefly Constance Zimmer's wonderfully acerbic "showrunner" character Quinn King) mentoring younger difficult women (primarily Rachel, who works as a lower-level producer supervised by Quinn) in challenging and unequal work relationships; the irony of Noxon's feminist practice of patiently training such mentees despite strong disagreements and sometimes tense relations is not lost upon me. During her turn at speaking to the *Hollywood Reporter's* Rose, Noxon summarizes her philosophy in co-developing *UnREAL* with Shapiro, where she consciously constructed a show that denaturalizes the romantic fairy tale fantasy of *The Bachelor* while also holding strong in showing realistic women characters who happen to engage in the narrative genre of televisual "reality."

For me just being so openly feminist [is the personal aspect she brings]. Just being so overtly, like, this show is about women who are not necessarily likable, doing a job that is despicable. And we're not going to be afraid of that. I mean, we were terrified, but we're not going to pull our punches. And we're not going to treat our women characters any differently than we would their male counterparts.

The Hollywood Reporter moderator Rose then shows an excerpt of an episode where Quinn barks orders to her diverse producers and production assistants, who are largely women, people of color, and women of color. Quinn cheerfully offers them bonuses for getting the reality show's performers, who are largely young and female, to engage in 911 calls, catfights, and nudity. Intimate corporate relations among women managers and workers, Noxon and Shapiro's writing staff seem to suggest, ever arise within a patriarchal capitalistic environment that makes for imperfect, often hard-to-watch, female-female dynamics. Then Noxon discusses the twisted mother-daughter bond between the hardened Quinn and her impulsive and self-destructive protégée Rachel in this workplace setting, their same-sex emotional tie contrasting with the flat heterosexist fantasy of "romantic" affection which the women's *Bachelor*-like show, *Everlasting*, is trying to create for its audience.

In terms of televisual engagements with Disney's fairy-tale paratext, I have found this show, created and run by women, much more engaging than *Once Upon a Time* (2011-2018), a series created and run largely by men for ABC-Disney's mostly female fairy tale genre fandom, for these very reasons. Though OUAT presents many strong female characters, some even competing or clashing with each other (most notably, antagonist-coparents Queen Regina and Emma Swan), their core emotional interactions feel to me abstract, randomly altering with the latest plot shifts, missing the messy complexity of female-female interchanges. By contrast, Noxon phrases her two lead female characters' relationship as an example of multiplicitous, complex kinds of love.

[I]t is all kinds of love. It's every kind of love. It's the love that wants to kill you. And I think that if you're not saying something—I've really grown tired of something that's clever and signifies nothing.

Following Noxon's straightforward emphasis on saying something of substance through her various series, I initially feel discomfort when Jacobson's turn at speaking comes. She begins by thanking FX Network which broadcasts *American Crime Story* (2016-present), an acclaimed historical crime anthology series which her Color Force company co-produces with Ryan Murphy (from Chapter 3) and his partners. FX has been so supportive at encouraging her and those producing partners to take risks and "push it" with the series, she gushes, and though I know that this network generally tries to give TV auteurs leeway compared to other media corporations, my mind starts to ho-hum at such a PR-sounding line, the very opposite of Noxon's saying something of meaning and Esmail's emphasis on risky but authentic expression. However, when Jacobson starts to address the racial-ethnic disparities behind the scenes during the production of *American Crime Story*'s first season, its *The People v. O.J. Simpson* storyline, I start to listen. That season in fact did an excellent job of depicting African American characters' and community perspectives regarding the controversial Simpson trial. So much so that I had been surprised when viewing it, because—while Ryan Murphy and his producing partners often try to be inclusive onscreen with diversity- and color-blind-casting practices, and have performed effective industrial change work with their "Half" initiative that aims to hire women directors for at least 50% of the episodes for all their TV series—their writers room racial-ethnic diversity still lags behind that of power-showrunners of color such as Shonda Rhimes. The third set of members of the producing team, film screenwriting duo Scott Alexander and Larry

Karaszewski, biopic specialists, tend to portray real-life stories of white people (*Man in the Moon*, *The People v. Larry Flint*, *Ed Wood*), and are not well-known for their diversity scripts. So I begin to wonder if the well-publicized practice of these showrunners putting together the African American writers and directors for key aspects of the production has been Jacobson's contribution. Showing a clip from the "Marcia, Marcia, Marcia" episode where workaholic LA prosecutor Marcia Clark is ogled and silently ridiculed for her tacky new perm by all the male officials of the court when she enters the courtroom and continues to be excoriated by the press for her looks as well as various gendered details of her personal life and self-presentation, Jacobson explains her different levels of representational challenge as a producer:

I was scared of taking on O.J. overall as a white person, knowing that this was a polarizing case, and that we made every effort to have an inclusive team. But ultimately, the people who began the project—we started with a bunch of white people. And we know that the case means different things to different people. And so that was much scarier to me than say the "Marcia, Marcia, Marcia" episode, taking on issues of feminism and sexism in the workplace. Like, when you know it, it feels easier and safer, and you can go for it. It's actually more scary I think when you know that you're a bit outside of your own experience ... how do you get that right? And how do you make sure that you're addressing complicated subjects that you know are divisive in a way that feels provocative, honest, but also self aware?

I appreciate her honesty, clarity, and intelligence which frankly surprised me; perhaps the Shyamalan fiasco had made the former executive grow, after all. Still, this feels very old-school to me, as if Jacobson's decades in the upper echelons of studio management have shrunk her imagination when it comes to the actual execution of diversity storytelling. Perhaps this is not so much because of her own cultural background but rather because, as Eszterhas might say, she's ultimately trained as a "suit," not a writer. Younger white female showrunners who originate from the ranks of teleplay or film scripters face the challenge of cultural representation as a regular workplace decision. It must be made not only when explicitly (for example) "black" storylines pop out from the annals of history, in essence leaving whiteness as a universal default, but also in the plotting of "normal" TV genre stories.

For example, in addition to Emily Kapnek, frequent employer of Asian American performers as characters, whose John Cho-starring rom-com series *Selfie* I mentioned in Chapter 3, Jennie Snyder Urman, creator and showrunner of LatinX-oriented Disney fairy tale paratext engaging soap dramedy *Jane the Virgin* (The CW, 2014-2019) which has featured a largely LatinX cast and is adapted from an actual Venezuelan telenovela, has committed to a full woman of color lineup for the three witch protagonists headlining her next project, that network's *Charmed* reboot (2018-onward), a casting and narrative choice that seems to have upset fans of the original series who seem to have expected another group of all-white sister sorcerers. Urman has emphasized in *Jane's* formal and thematic language the multi-generational, bilingual, and diasporic aspects of protagonist Jane's Villanueva family, so I suspect her approach to the multiracial performers of the new *Charmed* will also include family members of color. Similarly, Kapnek's latest comedy *Splitting Up Together* (2018-present) includes among its regular cast Bobby Lee and Lindsay Price as a Korean American neighboring couple to the main characters—an important statement, as usually Asian female characters are brought in only as guest stars to be paired with white-male leads, as a pop of exotic color.

Rachel Bloom, creator and showrunner of the musical dramedy *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* (The CW, 2015-2019), diversity cast one of the three male leads of her show, a Filipino American boy-next-door Josh Chan (played by Vincent Rodriguez), to play a romantic interest of her protagonist heroine, as well as filled the ranks of the younger supporting female characters who belonged to different ethnic minority communities with performers from black, LatinX, and Asian backgrounds. Unusual for a comedy, *Crazy* evinces a strong regionality; set in West Covina, California, it attempts to portray various immigrant peoples and other characters of color who have historically settled in such regions just outside of major metropolitan areas due to the lower cost of living, articulating the heroine not as generically white but specifically as an upper-middle-class Jewish professional from the East Coast. Bloom's fantasy practice involves the use of music-video and musical sequences in her TV storytelling which allows for characters to explore their fantasies and internal imagination, a technique she developed in her earlier career as YouTube auteur of such fun works as the short music video *Fuck Me, Ray Bradbury* where she portrays a female teen nerd in sexual love with the classic sf author. These white-female showrunners are pro-actively practicing diversity by featuring Asian American characters as protagonists, regular

characters, and family members of color rather than isolated tokens, taking that risk that Jacobson seems to feel so difficult, not standing still at being scared.

Despite these moderate advances, this generation of female showrunners still runs up against unexpected backlash when they violate longstanding TV narrative norms—not just about protagonist and family conventions but also other unspoken but powerful production rules, as Melissa Rosenberg attests to Rose regarding her creation and management of Marvel Comics character *Jessica Jones* (Netflix, 2015-present). Rosenberg got minor pushback from her writing staff with respect to the guidelines she initially established for the series, as her structural directives for *Jessica* teleplays upended many heteronormative conventions central to the series' audiovisual language, which had been formed around the narrative practices of noir: first, Jessica would not behave like a “honey pot,” sexily seducing people to get information; second, characters would not patronize strip clubs; third, the word “bitch” should rarely be used. Like Rob Thomas, white-male creator/showrunner of the feminist high-school noir series *Veronica Mars* (UPN Network, 2004-2007), who directed in the series bible for his writing staff that one of the titular heroine's love interests get depicted as a male version of the femme fatale, Rosenberg has transformed this traditionally masculinist postwar cinematic genre into a female-empowering twenty-first century televisual delight. The strongest negative responses she has received from fans, however, are not for the gritty topics presented in the *Jessica* episodes, such as domestic violence, sex assault, and abortion, but rather in reaction to the Jessica Jones-Luke Cage interracial (white-black) romance, racist and hateful online feedback by viewers who do not believe in miscegenation.

Considering from Rosenberg's interview that perhaps I'm being overly idealistic about and unfair to white-female producers, I pull back to intuit that Jacobson's presence within the *American Crime Story* producers' ranks has made some kind of a difference. Perhaps for a high-level producer and former executive like Jacobson, learning about diversity has been a painstaking process—with some mistakes (Shyamalan) and some wins (ACS Season 1; her controversial if accurate diversity-casting of African American actress Amanda Stenberg as fan favorite Rue in the film *The Hunger Games*).²⁰ The quality of her producing work has been strong, including Season 2 of *American Crime Story: The Assassination of Gianni Versace*. I found the story of gay serial killer Andrew Cunanan (mentioned in Chapter 3) empathetically moving, especially in narrating the working-class character's

delusional desire to move freely among the rich and famous as well as unflinchingly honest in its portrayal the brutality of his violent actions against wealthy gay white men with which he'd engage in sexual patronage, and cheered the producers' diversity casting of FilipinX performer Darren Criss in that lead role. However, I experienced disappointment that the showrunners also revealed Cunanan's Filipino American identity and his emotionally abusive father's background as an embittered ex-military Filipino immigrant—exposing subtle racism and US imperialism as possible motivations/contexts for the killer's actions—very late in the season, such that this colonial subtext essentially only exists for the last two or three of the ten episodes.

Whether it was Jacobson, Murphy and his team, or Alexander and Karaszewski who signed off on the teleplays by the gay English-Swedish scripter Tom Rob Smith, it seems that these collaborators did not make the same effort at recruiting writing or directing diversity labor from Filipino or Southeast Asian American LGBTQ communities to put together Cunanan's very central arc this season, as they had at getting black participation for the O.J. and other African American characters for Season 1 or even procuring gay white and LatinX participation for Season 2 (for the other character roles). I regard the general paucity of lasting Asian American community members' representations in scripted TV that are particularly created by Asian American producers, writers, and directors (in contrast, for example, with the much more prevalent African American depictions by black showrunners, writers, and directors) as an old Hollywood divide-and-conquer employment tactic to pit some ethnic or colonized minorities against others and to diffuse the creative power of diversity expression in general. In part to avoid situations where the working ranks of creative labor end up protesting against mis-representation of their communities by higher-up managers such as writers, producers, directors, and showrunners, in part out of the racist non-distinguishing between one particular racial-ethnic minority or indigenous population and another (“they’re all the same anyway”/”close enough; at least we’re in the ballpark”), and in part due to a sense of convenience for quick-and-easy casting logistics aka laziness about performing the work of cultural representation, the industry has generally avoided practicing cultural casting as well as other culturally specific forms of employment.²¹ This has been relevant for people in Asian and Pacific studies, because, for instance, LatinX and Asian performers historically in Hollywood often serve as stand-ins for Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (a recent example being the casting of Korean American performer

Grace Park as Hawaiian cop Kono Kalakaua in the *Hawaii Five-O* series reboot). The lack of diversity labor behind the camera in terms of writers rooms, directing staff, and executive-producing (plus top level showrunning) ranks means that the de facto employment practice of a media corporation might be to get a “close enough” showrunner it trusts to run a scripted show with significant diversity content in which the showrunner possesses limited cultural or personal knowledge; for example, gay white men (such as Murphy) running shows about women or gay men of color, white women (such as Urman) running shows about women of color, and in the case of the Asian American single-camera sitcom *Fresh off the Boat* (ABC, 2015-present), an East-Honolulu-raised Iranian American lesbian running a series about a straight Taiwanese man and his immigrant family.

The controversy of former animation and children’s TV showrunner Nahnatchka Khan adapting the 2013 autobiography of Taiwanese American celebrity chef Eddie Huang, *Fresh off the Boat: A Memoir*, into a prime-time format, has been well documented by the entertainment press. Huang, an outspoken community activist and former attorney who serves as a producer of the show and in the first season provided a voice-over narration as a grown-up version of himself looking back at his childhood in Orlando (a technique borrowed from Chris Rock’s childhood memoir-based scripted show, *Everybody Loves Chris*), felt bitterly disappointed with his experiences at ABC. The network’s development executives supervised Khan and her lower-level Asian American producers such as Melvin Mar, in eliminating key biographical elements from the book, such as the very old-school Chinese parenting of Huang’s father, whose cruel disciplinary practices had been identified by the Floridian state as abusive during Huang and his siblings’ childhood, and also the violently racist encounters that Huang had experienced with white peers while growing up in Central Florida. As a writer on whose life this second-ever Asian American sitcom was based, Huang even solicited advice from groundbreaking LGBTQ comedian Margaret Cho, who within one of her many memoirs had documented her own historical experience with ABC on the first Asian American sitcom in which she starred, *All-American Girl* (1994–1995).²² Cho basically told him that the network would treat him badly and not to rely upon it for fair representation. Huang, in a transmedial auteurist move similar to those of Ridley, traversed the many ICT options offered by twenty-first century digital media, and ended up with his own culinary travel docuseries on the edgy VICELAND network, the deliberately global, political, and raw *Huang’s World* (2016-present) which often features his real-life

parents and family who are not as sanitized and Americanized as their scripted counterparts on *Fresh Off the Boat*. Calling out Mar as an “Uncle Chan” (i.e. Chinese Uncle Tom) and *Fresh* an example of “Bamboo-Ceiling TV,” the hip-hop-influenced Huang has offered an excoriating op-ed piece about the show. In his essay, he describes encountering a three-minute ad for the series while smoking pot and watching the broadcast of a college football game, after months of tense interactions with the showrunning team (2015a):

After 18 months of back and forth, I had crossed a threshold and become the audience. I wasn’t the auteur, the writer, the actor, or the source material. I was the viewer, and I finally understood it. This show isn’t about me, nor is it about Asian America. The network won’t take that gamble right now. ... The only way they could even mention some of the stories in the book was by building a Trojan horse and feeding the pathogenic stereotypes that still define us to a lot of American cyclops. (My father) Randall was neutered, (my mother) Constance was exoticized, and Young Eddie was urbanized so that the viewers got their *mise-en-place*. People watching these channels have never seen us, and the network’s approach to pacifying them is to say we’re all the same. Sell them pasteurized network television with East Asian faces until they wake up intolerant of their own lactose, and hit ‘em with the soy...

It doesn’t sound like much, but it is. Those three minutes are the holy trinity [his family members] Melvin, Randall, Constance, Hudson, Forrest, Ian, and I sacrificed everything for. Our parents worked in restaurants, laundromats, and one-hour photo shops thinking it was impossible to have a voice in this country, so they never said a word. We are culturally destitute in America, and this is our ground zero. Network television never offered the epic tale highlighting Asian America’s coming of age; they offered to put orange chicken on TV for 22 minutes a week instead of Salisbury steak ... and I’ll eat it; I’ll even thank them, because if you’re high enough, orange chicken ain’t so bad.

When I read Huang’s takedown of ABC’s ethnic comedy factory (now including acclaimed shows such as Kenya Barris’ *Black-ish*), I feel deeply embarrassed on behalf of all American settlers of color in Hawai‘i; unlike Huang, who has implied in a somewhat racist remark that Khan’s ethnic Iranian American background disqualifies her for the position of running a TV show about Asian immigrants, I know that Khan is a Kaiser High School graduate and

therefore raised on the East side of O‘ahu.²³ She is thus extremely familiar with Asian immigrants from small-business and managerial-professional communities—the transnational class to which Huang and his restaurant-owning family belongs. East Honolulu, which is populated by upper-middle-class settler haole and well-to-do newcomer settler Asians, is both a demographic and a state of mind that I’m more than familiar with, as my college post-Pacific Asian Management Institute group of friends in AIESEC and the UHM College of Business Administration, most of whom had been Kaiser graduates, grew up there too. When I remember them—the rich Taiwanese girl whose parents had bought her a secure condo in a tony high-rise so that she could attend the CBA as a business student; the daughter of a wealthy Laotian family that owned the Keo’s chain of Thai restaurants (and who now holds the franchise license for a prominent ethnic fast food chain from the Philippines, Jollibee’s, whose branches serve working-class Filipino settlers in Waipahu, Ala Moana, and Iwilei, along with her Filipino-national husband whom she met in an Ivy-League MBA program); and the ex-boyfriend of my Hallmark-executive BFF, a JA male friend whom I hung out with during my Tokyo years, a bilingual businessman who’s repatriated back to Japan as a Japanese corporate manager and whose Japanese-national father, a UHM communications professor, literally wrote the book on how to sell Hawaiian land to overseas Japanese investors—I see the influence of this strong “local” culture of Asian settler business upon Khan’s showrunning work in FOTB.²⁴ Asian American settlers in Hawai‘i might be portrayed in literary writing, such as works published by Bamboo Ridge Press, as ontologically “different” from European and other US immigrants on the US continent, speaking Hawai‘i Creole English, cleaving to folkloric immigrant practices and Hawai‘i-regional cultural values, and finding ways to resist the mainland culture that threatens to assimilate island society into a homogenized California-style pave-over. However, in my experience, the East Asian and some Southeast Asian members of this multilingual managerial-professional demographic raised in East Honolulu and other moneyed suburbs created by the land development industry of this settler colony are just as fine fitting in with US corporations as they are with Asian capitalism, so long as they can find stable career paths within that support their upper-middle-class lifestyle. Diasporic and privileged, they have little investment in local community beyond business networks for their next ventures and land investments to grow their wealth. Personal insight into this class and cultural orientation frames my understanding of Khan’s own life story, expressed in the

feminist Smart Girls website of film star and TV producer Amy Poehler (who played protagonist Leslie Knope in mockumentary dramedy *Parks and Recreation* on NBC, 2009-2015), in which the Iranian American showrunner explains her training as a teleplay scripter:

When I was first starting out as a TV writer, I had to learn to write in other people's voices; to write characters the way my showrunners wanted. That's the job. And I know for a lot of people it becomes a point of pride, not being able to "tell" that a script was written by someone who is other in any way. "I'm not a *female* writer, or a *gay* writer, or a *Persian* writer, I'm just a writer." As if that were the ideal. You spend so much time trying to fit into the mainstream, trying to minimize what makes you different, you don't realize those are the things that make you unique.

Khan talks about what it was like to grow up in Hawai'i with so little Middle Eastern American representation on TV that she turned to cheesy and stereotypical wrestler the Iron Sheik (who had wrapped himself in the Iranian flag, talked in a heavy accent that she says "sounded like how my family spoke," and spat on the very notion of the US, during his exaggerated athletic performances) as a role model; and so few openly lesbian portrayals in scripted shows of that era, that she identified with butch-looking and -behaving but straight-identifying motorcycle-straddling character Jo in the sitcom *The Facts of Life* for orientation issues. To me, who pairs Khan's "close enough" strategy of viewer identification with her membership among the ethnically diverse but economically united transnational managers-professionals of global capital, Khan's notion of what constitutes a "diverse" writers room for *Fresh*, seems predictably problematic. She explains in an interview to the *Los Angeles Times*:

What I wanted to do was create a diverse room with diverse experiences. Whether they're Asian or Indian or gay, hip-hop fans, people with kids, people who felt like an outsider for any reason. I want all different kinds of experiences. That was kind of what I was looking for and then, of course, great writers, which they all are... Stuff starts to feel stale comedically when you're just rehashing things, so putting together a writers' room where the majority is made up of people who have not been the focus of the story, it flips everything around...

The family sitcom has been around forever, since the advent of television. I don't need to reinvent it. But if you take something and you do it in a way that you haven't necessarily seen before, that's right where I live.' (Hill)

Perhaps identifying too closely with her, I am very critical of these statements, because Khan's conceptualization of "difference" mirrors that of Hardt and Negri's multitude: "*Whether they're Asian or Indian or gay, hip-hop fans, people with kids, people who felt like an outsider for any reason*" expresses a multitudinous difference that challenges the sheer homogenization, the cultural imperialism, of media capital. Thinking of her as raised in a regional milieu similar to those of my AIESEC friends, who grew up as ethnic-majority members of their Asian national groups, taking culture for granted but desiring money overall, money for which their families had traveled diasporically to settle in the US to grow, part of me empathizes. This is a big deal, this is new, for Khan to fight for symbolic difference within corporate media. The other part remembers one of Huang's acerbic tweets about *Fresh*. He challenged, "Why do sitcoms have to avoid real issues and instead appropriate the symptoms of our problems for entertainment? I don't accept this" (2015b), no doubt in response to the ways that the show had whitewashed his extensive physical and terroristic bullying by white peers into a brief "Chink" remark made by a black male child character in a single episode, played for comedy (i.e., the hip-hop-loving young Eddie has expected to bond with this peer but encounters that comment instead). I think, "Why is this fight for symbolic difference such a thing?" While praising the show for its many firsts in Asian American televisual representation, as well as humorist Khan's subtle way of depicting cultural difference within its quirky episodes, TV critic Emily Nussbaum contrasts the broadcast version of *Fresh* with Huang's written memoir and also finds the former lacking in important context. While noting that the (scripted) young Eddie's love for the material culture of the 1990s (hip-hop fashion, rap music, and African American sports figures), the era in which the show is set, appeals broadly to Gen X viewers who share the same pop nostalgia, Nussbaum criticizes the series for exploiting this pop-cultural dimension of Huang's life without revealing the full picture:

Huang wanted something pungent, like an FX anti-hero dramedy, or like the nineties sitcom "Married with Children," the type of show that would underline (and maybe glamorize) his violent youth, his charismatic dick of a dad, and the roots of Huang's own flamboyant persona. That desire wasn't sheerly egotistical: Huang was eager to push back at the cliché of Asian men as passive, genitally cheated nerds ("the eunuch who can count," as he puts it in the book)—a Long Duk Dong stereotype still visible

on shows like CBS's "2 Broke Girls." Huang wanted "Fresh Off the Boat" to "go hard," like his nineties hip-hop heroes...

Reading the book, then watching the show, you get why Huang was frustrated: without a cruel bully for a father, Eddie's taste for hip-hop feels more superficial—in the book, it's an abused kid's catharsis and an identification with black history.

As I think back on the complex dynamic between black media expression, Middle Eastern American show management, and Asian American audience reception within the cultural production of television texts that portray ethnicity and racism, I come across an ad for what is expected to be this summer's sleeper hit for women audiences, *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018). Produced by Jacobson's Color Force company and starring Constance Wu, star of FOTB in which she plays young Eddie's mother Jessica (and fortunate recipient of the #StarringConstanceWu media movement which I explained in Chapter 2), as well as an all-Asian and Asian American cast, the highly anticipated film is not just Color Force's first film production employing a director of color (Jon M. Chu). It's also a market test to evaluate whether Asian American immigrant and diasporic characters can constitute content for Hollywood genre filmmaking. For it's not a realistic drama like *The Joy Luck Club*, the default narrative convention for non-black minority media expression within mainstream film culture; it's a romantic drama/comedy based on Kevin Kwan's 2013 novel of the same name, using the well-oiled generic mechanisms of romdram and romcom to Trojan-horse Asian American stories into late-summer commercial fare. Deciding whether to buy a ticket, I test out that twentieth-century adage by Audre Lorde of the master's tools, when I recall Nussbaum's conclusion about Khan's sitcom: "'Fresh Off the Boat' is unlikely to dismantle the master's house. But it opens a door." I will see *Crazy Rich Asians* not because it's about an ordinary Chinese American female professional who visits her Singaporean fiancée's transnational family of, well, crazy rich Asians, but because of the fleeting political portal it creates.

Notes

1. As a teaching evaluator, I have observed UHM military science classes, where "action" scenes from films by Bay, the Scott brothers, and other blockbuster cinema makers who portray armed combat, are often shown and discussed as part of the standardized curriculum. To be fair to such faculty, I must note that in addition to

- the obvious ideological function served by these movie texts in such reception conditions, one object of these classroom lessons is distinguishing between Hollywood's version of war and reality.
2. See Mangione and also Trenholm for 'TV critics' responses to the Apple Watch's appearances.
 3. For JTV's diegetic and real business relationship with Target, see Carusillo. For the efforts of *Gotham* and other expensively produced superhero shows to team with corporate advertisers, see Steinberg.
 4. See Lafayette and Bravo.
 5. See Mueller for research on black consumers and their advertising-related desires.
 6. Generally out of respect for global Indigenous peoples and resistance against the genocidal trend of having every symbolic trace of them linguistically erased within our popular culture, I avoid the naturalized use of common twenty-first-century advertising-industry terms such as "digital natives" and "native advertising," in favor of unpacking these phrases or deconstructing their meaning in practice.
 7. For examples of how sequential storytelling, narrative ad campaigns, brand storytelling, and other commercial narratological strategies are advanced by the millennial advertising industry, see Sutcliffe; Ashraf; and Smith.
 8. See The Compassion Hui's Facebook page, especially national news posts by founder Susan Schultz, which track how US mental health education within college campuses and communities has progressed in this era of active shooter gun violence, public suicides of celebrities, and general cultural proclivities towards depression and personality disorder.
 9. For a run-down of Gibson's prejudicial comments exposed by the millennial digital gossip industry through mid-2011, see O'Connor.
 10. See Eszterhas (2012 and 2005). Of course, this claim by the Hungarian writer might explain most of Gibson's 2004 *The Passion of the Christ*, which some horror aficionados have called a torture-porn entry.
 11. See E.O. Wright's website where a draft of his encyclopedia entry on "social class" aptly summarizes decades of research and theory on the contradictory position of middle-class managers.

12. For an excellent and thorough thematic and historical critique of *Die Another Day*, see Chung.
13. For a summary of Cubby Broccoli, his producing partner Irving Allen, and his Warwick Productions' monumental struggles against British censors, UK and US film distributors, and the US Production Code which banned all homosexual portrayals until 1961, towards making the groundbreaking *The Trials of Oscar Wilde* (1960), see Miller.
14. Bass's writing "assistants" were well known to be female and young, so Eszterhas also implied a sexually exploitative angle to Bass's employment of these so-called "Ronettes." My concern is that Bass had been using these women to help him pump out a higher volume of formulaic, if highly-remunerated, dramatic scripts for the Hollywood machine; he may or may not have been relying on his female employees' sexual services, but he definitely took advantage of their writing services. I agree with Eszterhas' censure of this writer, as the latter dominated the writing of industry scripts centralizing women and women of color protagonists/stars throughout the 1990s: *The Joy Luck Club*, *When a Man Loves a Woman*, *Waiting to Exhale*, *Dangerous Minds*, *My Best Friend's Wedding*, *Stepmom*, *How Stella Got Her Groove Back*, and *Snow Falling on the Cedars*.
15. "If you see a Hungarian on the street, go up to him and slap him. He will know why" being my favorite of the litany of Hungarian jokes Eszterhas mentions as typically circulated around Hollywood studios during the classical era of filmmaking (26).
16. See Boyes' dissertation on how the Hawai'i Seven had been contained during the Territorial postwar era; he lists the notorious "communists" on p. 85.
17. See for example Garrett for an example of one of the kinder book reviews where critics commented on Bamberger's hagiographic descriptions and speculations about Shyamalan's creative processes in negative but fair ways. See Goldstein, inventor of the contemptuous term "Shyamaladenfreude," whose influential *Los Angeles Times* book review that trashed the Asian American director started a more vicious and strident online trend denouncing him.
18. An exception was Nikki Finke, the *Deadline* founder whom I mentioned in Chapter 2. See Finke.

19. Cristina Bacchilega mentions her fairy tale studies students' use of the abbreviation HEA in her book on the fairy-tale web, but this term is also well-utilized among romance-genre readership.
20. See Stewart for a sense of the degree of racist online responses to the producers' casting of Stenberg as the beloved Rue, whom author Suzanne Collins had described as brown-skinned.
21. See Wenthe for criticism of Adam Sandler's *The Ridiculous Six* which used Native performers as props, following the long Hollywood tradition of racist portrayals of indigenous peoples especially in Westerns. Corporate media tends to fear that if it performs diversity-casting practices, laboring performers may protest when their cultures are inaccurately or problematically portrayed by mostly white scripters, producers, and directors in the industry.
22. For an account of the Korean American comedienne's workplace experiences with ABC executives who in addition to monolithic views of Asian Americans, forced the star to lose weight, triggering an eating disorder, see Cho.
23. The public remark Huang makes is the context of Mar telling him that he had gotten his own show on ABC and that Khan will run it, to which Huang replies, "I would be excited, but you attached a Persian writer, and I'm kinda worried it's going to be 'The Shahs of Cul-De-Sac Holando'" (Huang 2015a). Huang is referencing both the hip-hip nickname of Orlando where he grew up and *The Shahs of Sunset* (Bravo, 2012-present), a popular reality TV series featuring an Iranian American family and their friends, produced by media mogul Ryan Seacrest who has used the reality genre to introduce new immigrant populations to the US pop cultural landscape, most notably Armenian Americans with the sometimes infamous *Keeping Up With the Kardashians* (E!, 2007-2017).
24. See Nishiyama for his bilingual English-Japanese terminology commonly used to sell Hawaiian land to Japanese real-estate investors.

CHAPTER 5. THE 10 BATTLES FOR INDUSTRIAL INNOVATION FOUGHT BY FANTASTIC TV SCRIPTERS IN A TRANSMEDIAL ERA

“Writin’ is Fightin’”—Ishmael Reed

Counter-Hegemonic Mentorships that Subvert the Standard Screenplay Form

While I write this dissertation, I dream of *Sirens* (Freeform, 2018-present), a show about merpeople leaving their ocean depths to encounter human residents of the “mermaid capital of the world,” the (fictional) fishing and tourist town of Bristol Cove on the coast of the Pacific Northwest. For writers like my husband and I, the urban-fantasy/horror series on the former ABC Family Network contains just enough anti-colonial, fourth-wave feminist content within the thematic tropes shaped by *Sirens*’ co-creators and executive producers (thoughtful white guys Eric Wald and Dean White), that we might, I suspect, fit in well with their writers room. The show does not only employ performers of color as key Bristol Cove denizens—to play black, Asian, and LatinX fisherpeople and other townsfolk, among other multi-ethnic acting roles—but a sizable chunk are Native Alaskans living in the small seaside town with their settler neighbors, specifically Haida. Like the *Twilight* film series’ “close enough” casting of different tribal Native Americans and mixed-indigenous LatinX performers as the Pacific Northwest Quileute “werewolf” clan, overseen by Chris Weitz, the Mexican American helmer of the franchise’s *New Moon* installment (2009), *Sirens*’ showrunner Emily Whitesell utilizes various indigenous actors to play the Haida, including Maori performer Rena Owen (star of Tamahori’s 1994 *Once Were Warriors*) in the key role of hybrid Haida-mermaid mentor Helen Hawkins, the town’s mysterious folklorist, unofficial social historian, and curio shop manager who helps the three barely-out-of-their-teens protagonists protect and hide the mermaids from the very flawed adults who run the town. The narrative constantly draws parallels between the Haida and these multiracial merpeople, forcing viewers to compare the past genocide of the sea creatures by the Bristol Cove fishing industry with the slaughter of Native North Americans, especially since indigenous Haida characters are foregrounded as a significant local presence within the story world. The three co-protagonists represent indigenous, fantastic-oceanic, and white-settler communities in difficult, ever-changing relationships with each other. With its black female protagonist Maddie Bishop (Nigerian British actress Fola Evans-Akingbola) presented as the adopted

daughter of the town sheriff, the Haida Dale Bishop (Comanche performer Gil Birmingham, basically cast in the same “compassionate Native lawman” role as he played in the *Twilight* films) serving as the best friend to main mermaid Ryn (played with memorably mime-like alienness by Belgian actress Eline Powell), the narrative emphasizes the history of the rich white family of the third protagonist Ben Pownall (played by English performer Alex Roe), who like his girlfriend Maddie is a marine biologist at the town’s oceanic research institute, whose seaman ancestors had perpetrated this genocide against the mermaids as well as founded the seaside town, standing as a symbol of its violent settler-colonial past. The Pownalls, who rule the town through their ownership of the fishing corporation that controls Bristol Cove’s overall economic landscape and that employs almost everyone except a handful of small businesses which subsist on folkloric-mermaid tourism, represent colonial power, and the merpeople, who had historically escaped complete slaughter when nearby Haida gave them shelter, fill the role of the posthuman colonial subject, in what I consider a first-contact SF text.

I try to talk my husband into co-authoring a sample script for this ongoing series, which the labor market generally requires of hopeful teleplay authors. We must submit a sample of a script for a series still on the air, when applying as staff assistants, then eventually getting promoted to scripters, within the TV writers room. My beloved SF connoisseur and genre snob, however, resists my recommendation: to him, the show’s core premise about mermaids qualifies it as a story about fantasy events which, to borrow definitional distinctions by New Wave writer Samuel R. Delany, “could not have happened” (11), meaning the series’ narrative cannot pass as the empirically possible events comprising a true speculative-fiction tale. As an indigenous person in diaspora, too, my husband distrusts that the Freeform Network holds membership within the ABC-Disney family of television, part of Disney’s larger transmedia empire which historically has both disseminated stereotypically racist or reductive images of indigenous peoples and also extracted Native artistic and cultural labor in exploitative ways. I have written elsewhere about how through symbolic expropriation, a form of cultural production practiced by Disney and other Global North media corporations that crank out mass-media fantasy narratives, Native stories and other indigenous information are extracted into the narrative factory of capitalism, which hybridizes them into Western or “modern” colonial genre forms, homogenizes them further for optimal monetization, then attempts to replace those community stories and information

with *its* canned product within hegemony's highly commodified symbolic marketplace. Like expropriated Native land which the modern socialist settler state might nationalize, or expropriated Native land which the modern capitalist settler state might similarly privatize—both governmental economic actions towards empire—the material and bureaucratic process of symbolic expropriation is not a done deal, but negotiated, resisted politically, changeable at any time through institutional practices and community movements. So he says no to participating in the expropriative process.

But most important to him, even over taking a political stance, is the narrative experimentation of form, which can widen a text's potential for transgressive content or a subversive viewing engagement with that text. I had thought Freeform a good future home for us as a writing team, not only because the show's writing, directing, and performance exhibit a fair level of narrative quality to be expected of the Disney brand's more prestigious television projects, but also because at the beginning of 2018, the Mouse House's TV executives had mildly rebooted Freeform with a bold new brand identity. "A little forward" promises edgier, arty, yet still commercial content for Freeform's tween, teen, and young adult viewership, compared to its earlier phases of considerably less formally experimental but still high-quality storytelling marked by audiovisual realism and linear story structures (*Pretty Little Liars*, *The Fosters*, *Recovery Road*). And *Sirens* is the sole SF-fantasy genre offering in this new slate of "little forward" shows, so the overall production quality, performance levels, and story content are quite good. For my formalist husband, however, this show's narrative structure and audiovisual language still feel much too simplistic, linear, and filled with overly explicit plot information. Watching a full episode feels to him like trudging through an assembly line, mechanical and wasteful of expressive opportunities to create something different and refreshing. He understands well that the network's programming primarily attracts millennials, who devour this story on their devices beat by linear beat and whose minds are too wrapped up in other distractions to engage truly weird story techniques. However, this surrealist finds the classical Western three-act dramatic structure overly artificial, silencing of his writing-directing voice and binding of his experimental storytelling style. In our years together, one of the core questions I have pondered has been the relationship between indigeneity and form: beyond the obvious stereotypical equation of Native=traditional, why is it that global indigenous practitioners of modern (often colonial/postcolonial) mass-media forms undertake all kinds of conventions of commercial

artistry with so much craft and chutzpah? I think of John Kneubuhl's boldly layered musical intermediations in *The Wild, Wild West* as well as Kinjō Tetsuo's sheer narrative force in marrying anti-colonial SF with contemporary (if figured) Okinawan political lessons in *Ultra 7*, but also about Albert Wendt's print-literary *The Adventures of Vela* which exercises an audacious generic mixology that in theory really should not work—but which he pulls off with heady splendor. Trained in part by white-feminist avant-garde and postmodern poets, I've found Western and white efforts at artistic experimentation often intellectually interesting but spiritually shallow and labored, making me sense that they are not informed by a deep memory of artistic tradition stemming from community ethics. One of the first things I learned when my husband and I got to know each other was his deep awareness of aesthetic structure and formal technique, a trait that intrigued me because, like Okinawans, Japanese adore form; but unlike our indigenous subjects of empire, we use it towards social control, order, and the material disciplining of individual affect (e.g., what Western Japanophiles call “zen,” I call orientation towards fascism, an astute analysis once told to me by Hawaiian spiritual practitioner and former UHM ASUH President Mamo Kim that I have kept near my heart ever since). Uchinanchu marshal form as the living expression of individual spirit explored through community traditions and a sense of moral-social responsibility. In her indigenous screenwriting and indigenous film production classes, my husband's late mentor, UHM Academy for Creative Media professor Merata Mita (the Māori filmmaker whom I have referenced in Chapters 2 and 4), encouraged her indigenous students and students of color to unearth their personal *mise-en-scene* and narrative signatures by using intuition—including culture, environment, familial traits, and other numinous-corporeal elements—to shape story structure. As a result, when he screen writes, my husband's evolving audiovisual style and narrative order thus echo what Okinawans might call (after their famous culinary genre which Westerners mistranslate into “stir-fry”) *chanpuru*—a seemingly chaotic mix of ingredients that engages the emotions and soul in surprisingly potent ways. To hone this, his preferred TV line-up consists of experimental comedy and arty animation shows which formally and structurally go against the rules of all other scripted series in Peak TV, especially Cartoon Network's Adult Swim late-night programming block and that channel's various mockumentaries, interstitial avant-garde sketches, and other cross- and multi-media attempts to sneak irony, narrative pranking, and utter postmodernism into the staid, predictable television ecology. Though a science fiction

writer, he cannot bear to watch most SF on Peak TV such as *Colony* or *The Expanse*, because their narrative presentations, their informational rhythms, prove too rote. We tried viewing the well-received *Lost* (ABC, 2004-2010), and though the pilot's establishing of a relatively cinematographic language for the series felt visually interesting for TV in that era, once the televisual narrative revealed that most of this formal "experiment" would be deployed towards tricking viewers into paying attention then not rewarding them with any kind of substantial story or thematic development, he gave up on it (a decision that took him all of that first episode to execute, whereas for other fans, it required several seasons of patient hopeful watching). Like SF author and critic Delany, whose classic "About 5,750 Words" emphasizes the inseparability of SFnal form and content, my husband craves "quality" fantastic TV which exhibits signs of both dimensions executed surprisingly and well.

As for me, a postcolonial feminist narratologist, one reason I enjoy the TV medium as opposed to theatrical film is that the former often strives against established storytelling constrictions of the classical European three-act dramatic opening the door to narratively complex story forms which can better illustrate sociopolitical worlds and human interconnections towards the delivery of critical thematic content. Though most television dramas still strive for linearity, the long-form aspect of the structure tends to split narrative focus between multiple protagonists (rather than the three-act structure's single hero), meaning that a single episode does not need to contain related character arcs that require a single throughline building between the first, second, and third acts, usually through over-focalizing these characters' relationship to a sole protagonist; that episode can instead comprise three mini-episodes of unrelated stories and characters whose actions do not immediately impact each other. Peak TV narrative experiments include flash-forwards, made famous by *Lost* (ABC, 2004-2010); dual past and present timelines that collide at the season's end in a big event that reveals causal connections between then and now, best exemplified by *How to Get Away with Murder* (ABC, 2014-present); chronologically non-linear past, present, and future timelines that intersect to reveal thematic parallels as well as "secret" information on characters' backgrounds, well executed especially by *This is US* (NBC, 2016-present); the same personalities playing different characters in new regional and historical story worlds for whole seasons, as experimented on in *Archer* (FX/FXX, 2009-present); season-long anthologies that reboot in the next season using the same stable of performers in a postmodern casting practice recalling stage troupes (FX, *American Horror Story* franchise,

2011-present); mixed “realistic” and “fantastic” genre story world crossovers (e.g. the animated *Scooby Doo* with live-action urban fantasy *Supernatural*; the urban fantasy *Sleepy Hollow* with the realistic procedural *Bones*); and so on. While more formally rigid in terms of structure, comedies can also split the narrative between present and future (CBS, *How I Met Your Mother*, 2005-2014); contain multiverses with different timelines and different versions of the same characters who cross over to the other universes and interact (Cartoon Network, *Rick and Morty*, 2013-present); mix animation, musical, documentary, and other genre modes within the same scripted episode (ABC, *Black-ish*, 2014-present); shift presentation formats from multi-camera to single-camera and thus genres from light comedy to dramedy within a season (UPN/The CW/BET, *The Game*, 2006-2015); present a mini-anthological structure within each episode so that each act becomes a “sketch” unrelated to the events in the other two but occurring in the same story world (CBS, *Life in Pieces*, 2014-present); reboot the whole story universe with the same characters but slight alterations to their relationships and world every single episode (NBC, *The Good Place*, 2016-present); and hijack the orientation of the family sitcom such that all the characters argue over a specific political issue throughout the entire episode, thus remaking the sitcom into a discursive comedy (NBC, *The Carmichael Show*, 2015-2017). It is as if teleplay writers and TV producers in this era are following the advice of screenwriting scholars Ken Dancyger and Jeff Rush in *Alternative Screenwriting: Rewriting the Hollywood Formula* (2013), who focus on alternatives to the standard screenplay form and thus content. They advise that writers strive to practice “counter-conventions” to core elements in scripting such as structure, premise, the role of conflict, character, dialogue, atmosphere, action line, rising action, subtext, discovery, reversal, and turning point (2-6). Instead of taking these elements for granted and drumming their conventions into aspiring screenwriters as naturalized rules, as do leading screenplay guidebooks like *Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting* (by screenplay “guru” Robert McKee) and *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting* (by rival guru Syd Field), the scholarship of Dancyger in particular emphasizes that quality screenplays have long been tied to alternative, independent, and international cinema, rather than only commercial or Hollywood movies. For Dancyger, core elements such as structure and character are largely shaped by genre (2001, 59-74); this contrasts with most mainstream screenwriting how-to books which do not include considerations of genre during discussions of narrative structure, mentioning it only in terms of specific examples of scenes and technique. Genre mixing for him, and for

these current Peak TV writers and producers, is essential to finding new audiovisual narrative structures.

What types of work environments, creative-labor conditions, and institutional arrangements of industry support these types of formal experimentation? In the modern Hollywood writers room or development/production team, where art and politics are largely still viewed as unrelated, screenwriters who aim for weird narrative form or counter-hegemonic content must phrase these within the risk-taking language of corporate innovation rather than individual artistic expression. Articulating subversive writing as innovative offers a type of workplace disposition to the teleplay scripter; however, it's up to the management, the producers, executive producers, and showrunners to accept this articulation and grant the disposition, which they can do overtly or behind-the-scenes. Such an act runs counter to the industrial flow of power in the conventional writers room, where working teleplay scripters have been brought in as replaceable work-for-hire labor to hew out screenplays that match the showrunner's and/or series creator's vision. For example, SF power-showrunners like *The Orville*'s Brannon Braga, as my former teacher and *Mad Men* writer Maria Jacquemetton who worked under him in *Star Trek: Enterprise* mentioned in her Pacific New Media screenwriting class, commonly rewrite every single script that lower-level staff writers author, minimizing their artistic voice. In even worse examples of oppressive or exploitative showrunners who create unsafe or unprofessional job conditions for teleplay scripters, increasingly exposed due to the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements' public-educational efforts towards prioritizing gendered workplace safety, Mark Schwahn of the former *One Tree Hill* and current series *The Royals* was recently exposed by several performers on his shows as a repeat sexual harasser on the job; fantastic-genre fan favorite Joss Whedon (of *Buffy*, *Angel*, and *Firefly* fame), as well, was called out by his ex-wife as repeatedly and consistently engaging in affairs with female teleplay writers, actresses, producers, and other women workers he had supervised. One of Shonda Rhimes' lieutenants at the feminist production company Shondaland, Krista Vernoff, currently showrunner of *Grey's Anatomy* but past producer and staff writer of the long-running original *Charmed*, which I've mentioned several times in this dissertation, a show about female witches largely written and produced by men, talked recently about workplace safety in a searing attack on industry men who have been defending powerful TV and film producer Brett Ratner (*X-Men: The Last*

Stand, Hercules, the *Rush Hour* film franchise, TV's *Prison Break*) against industry women's claims of consistent, egregious sexual harassment:

...(L)et's talk about overwhelming contradictions. When my powerful male showrunner asked me in front of a room full of male colleagues whether or not I was good in bed, I went on to invite him to my wedding. We kept in touch. I signed emails to him with x's and o's. Why? Because when women are dealing with powerful men who they know to be abusive, the first instinct, often, is to keep them on our sides. The first instinct, often, is to play nice, and to get along. And too often our instinct is to minimize the abuse we've experienced and our trauma around it by focusing on the positive attributes of our abusers. And yes, abusers often have positive attributes too because humanity is full of contradictions. Rapists and serial predators often have great minds and are great artists. When a woman has been hurt, she often pulls her abuser close. This is basic psychology. And when a woman has been hurt by a man as powerful as someone like Brett Ratner is in this town, she has nothing to gain by making an enemy of him and a whole lot to lose. So she often stays quiet and she stays friendly and stays in touch and signs her notes with x's and o's.

Vernoff's courage in taking on Rattner, whose extremely well-financed production company, RatPac-Dune Entertainment, pours hundreds of millions of dollars towards funding fantastic-film franchises which it co-finances with Warner Brothers such as the DC Extended Universe superhero series (*Batman v. Superman: Dawn of Justice*, *Suicide Squad*, *Justice League*, *Wonder Woman*, etc.), is a remarkable David v. Goliath move. In the Hollywood pecking order, her position as a showrunner of a beloved prime-time series adored by women viewers, even one with as consistently high ratings as *Grey's*, means nothing in the industry's power scale where women's genres (the TV medical drama) are devalued by masculinist big-budget ones (effects-driven SF-fantasy action-blockbuster cinema) within this financial hierarchy.

Vernoff's brave rhetorical strategy to deploy a life story mode towards building thoughtful feminist consciousness among media industry managers and employees as well as among the viewing public on behalf of the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements (the latter of which is co-organized by her mentor-boss Rhimes) is not an uncommon one. Drawing on her own experiences, showrunner Amy Berg (*Counterpoint*, *Eureka*, *Person of Interest*), a self-

identified SF and comic-book nerd, has been using digital ICTs to deconstruct the institutional practice of writers room management and educate working writers on navigating this often sexist, racist, and vicious workplace environment. Her tweets and other social-media posts frequently emphasize how the default management style in the writers room favors a capitalistic *laissez faire*, such that the most selfish and harmfully aggressive (usually male) writers quickly rise up through producing ranks of a show's authority structure and that considerate, collaborative, socially responsible scripters, including many women, immigrants, and people of color, end up defending themselves artistically against, or falling behind career-wise from, the political-economic majority of writers and producers whose cultural and moral points of view they might not share. What I've enjoyed about Berg's digital writerly activism is that she occasionally describes the management practices of effective showrunners, including kindhearted white men, who prove exceptions to this *laissez faire* rule, and who exercise considerate worker guidance and nourish meaningful artistry. She additionally practices feminist mentoring, by using tweets to advise diverse writers on the politics of getting hired.

An example of her media tactics can be found in *The Blacklist*'s "Go Into the Story" blog curated by Scott Myers; in "Tweetstorm: Amy Berg on Staffing a Writer's Room," Myers curates Berg's May 3, 2018, tweets on how to get interviewed for staff writer positions by showrunners—

- Now that doesn't mean we (showrunners) want you to jump right in and pitch ideas for the show. That's dangerous ground you're treading on. The odds we won't like what you're pitching are high and everything you say that doesn't feel "right" is a knock against you.
- If you're confident in your ideas, that's great. There will be an opportunity to work them into the conversation organically instead of going down a list. There are showrunners who want to hear your ideas... but let them be the ones to ask.
- Whether or not showrunners want your ideas is usually determined by whether the series is serialized or procedural. As I live mostly in the serialized world, I don't expect you to pitch.

- What I want to hear is your thoughts on the characters... why you responded to them (or didn't) and where we might take them next.

Even while conducting this creative-labor professional development from a distance, over the digital-era ICT of Twitter, Berg's posts instruct me and my husband a key distinction between our structural preferences for TV narrative. In fact, his style—grounded in form—honors the episodic (narrowly articulated by Berg as “procedural,” as that's the most common/commercial dramatic TV genre that emphasizes heavily episodic narratives rather than to-be-continued serialized ones) and my technique—grounded in plot turns—tends towards the serial, like that of Berg. I am finally grasping why I like *Sirens* more than him; he regards its writers room's linear over-plotting, a key trait of scripted TV during this Peak era, as “fat” that needs to be trimmed on the way to more engaging formal exercises of genre expression. I am also moved by Berg's generosity in providing rich qualitative data on her mindset when in the act of interacting with prospective hires. Writers reading these tweets will know what to expect during their time being questioned by management; develop an intuition of how an ethical showrunner would behave in an interview situation; and comprehend producers' reasons for asking some questions and not others. Berg also depicts the microstructures of power in terms of who gets to speak about what during this exchange, lending more helpful career info.

Thanks to showrunners such as Vernoff and Berg, armed with digital and social ICT expression, women and minority writers in this era need not feel so alone, as the former writing assistant Amaani Lyle on the hit TV sitcom *Friends* (NBC, 1994-2004) had no doubt been.¹ In the late 1990s, the black female former military officer who had previously worked in the kinder landscape of children's scripted television entered the top-rated prime-time comedy's writers room. Like all teleplay-writing hopefuls aiming to rise from writing assistant to staff writer, she had planned to negotiate with her supervisors different writing assignments and eventually the authorship of full scripts. However, the show's toxic masculine environment of constant offensive and sexist jokes (including misogynistic situations in which staff writers would speculate aloud on the how each of the three female characters might be subject to sex assaults by one of the male characters, for fun) in a majority white-male workplace, led to Lyle's unsuccessful but potentially industry-changing lawsuit. *New York Times* reporter Christopher Noxon analyzed this gendered (and racialized)

workplace dynamic of the 1999 *Friends* case as possessing structural and institutional causes, reflecting the poor management style of the showrunner:

Often, the only real authority figure is the show runner, who may have created the series but probably doesn't have any management experience. In rare cases, show runners are efficient, staffs are productive and everyone goes home in time for dinner with loved ones. More often, scripts bomb at table readings, egos are battered and free-floating anxiety coalesces into white-hot panic at precisely the moments writers are expected to be at their funniest.

So truly supportive, capable, and respectful showrunners can be the exception rather than the rule, especially in an occupation overwhelmingly populated by producers labeled “auteurs” who advantage their structural (and upper-middle-class white-male cultural) privilege as predatory, abusive, controlling bosses. The work conditions of teleplay writers and other screen writers that I have written about throughout this dissertation reflect unusual enactments of industry production relations, where the producers or showrunners actively nurture, defend, and advance the interests of such teleplay writers who present uncommon material, even though the former might wield the workplace authority to refuse that material or steal and revise those innovations for themselves by leveraging the legitimacy of their superior auteurist status. These specific enactments of production relations are not regular occurrences and thus must be noted. Such producers should be valued as they are more likely than the average showrunner to regard with open minds unconventional premises, pilots, and pitches that potentially transform current televisual practice, a management feat that demands confident listening and deep awareness of how collaborative innovation works. For future scholarship, these often understudied producers need to be researched as mentors, their careers critically reconsidered as teachers and trainers of excellence; if we only regard their official track record of show creation, writing, and/or the technical aspects of production, on the surface they could appear as traditional executive producers of conventional storytelling, when in fact they might occupy contradictory roles as, for instance, counter-hegemonic colonial mentors (e.g., Sam Mendes who produced Logan’s *Penny Dreadful* or Ray Bradbury who produced Tamahori’s *Bradbury Theater* episodes) or counter-hegemonic heteropatriarchal mentors (e.g., Eliot Lawrence who produced and created showrunner Jeanine Sherman Barrois’s *Claws*). Many times their official work, be it producing or other types of screen writing, is not as politically salient as the sponsorship they

lend to these experimental scripters, guidance and protection that can seem counter-intuitive (especially if the style or content of typical works made by these producers outside of this mentor-mentee relationship departs from those of the more subversive, edgy, anticolonial, or feminist writers) but that is often counter-hegemonic in effect.

For example, TV/film producer Mark Gordon—whose long list of studio flicks do not fit any pattern of genre, budget, or quality, and whose other TV productions such as the procedural *Criminal Minds* franchise seem fairly conventional artistically if politically conservative—has played the key role of producing Shonda Rhimes’ early TV series including *Grey’s Anatomy* and *Private Practice* which advanced the interesting genre experiments discussed in earlier chapters of this dissertation. By no stretch of the imagination is Gordon an auteur; he rather resembles a practical businessman who gets work season after season due to his capable logistical, financial, and organizational talents, and his other produced work, while diversity-cast (including the recently canceled *Quantico*), ranges all over the ideological map. My suspicion is that Gordon’s pragmatic institutional skills, paired with Rhimes’ African American feminist vision and storytelling abilities, has helped usher the now-powerful black female showrunner’s career to the position where it resides today, earning her not just the enviable “Thank God Its Thursday” lineup with ABC, but a recent \$100 million deal to produce shows for Netflix. As my husband and I journey tentatively towards TV land, planning a partnership as co-writers of teleplays and co-producers of original shows, we need to seek out this kind of supportive mentor as much as we need to flesh out our writing (genre) voice.

Corporate Interests, Media Convergence, and Digital-Era Social Movements

Even as Berg, Rhimes, and other TV scripters use digital media to extend their corporate roles towards community expression, for social justice and inclusion, grassroots movements, and broad political change, the transnational media corporations that employ them wield data-analytic tools to marshal twenty-first-century ICTs towards “monetizing” (aka commodifying) more and more communicative practices, aiming for a world in which capitalist production and consumption grow more and more fused into a single solid seamless circuit with no community or public spaces between. Two prominent industry news events arose as I labored towards concluding this dissertation, events which made me consider the stakes for fantastic-genre teleplay writers that hope to craft meaningful

community content via corporate mass medial storytelling in this era. First, Matt Miller, showrunner of *Lethal Weapon*, despite his series' popularity in the ratings, faced the threat of the show's cancellation when lead actor Clayne Crawford (playing Mel Gibson's former role of Riggs) was revealed through online sources and viral videos to have been abusive and endangering of the show's workers as well as of his costar, Damon Wayans (who played Murtaugh, Riggs's partner).² Longtime industry survivor Wayans, an innovative comedian and actor from a family of respected performers, surreptitiously hinted at such problems earlier in his social media accounts without mentioning specific names or incidents; later other media reports sourced to anonymous crew and cast, including the video, surfaced, legitimizing his indirect criticisms of the show's management in letting Crawford—the younger “star” performer—continue so far in his harmful professional behavior. It turns out that Wayans had been hurt in a stunt during an episode directed by Crawford, which to me indicates that the latter, white and young, had accumulated more behind-the-scenes workplace authority than the former, old and black, unusually quickly (as directing work is typically only granted to performers who wield the political favor of the showrunner, and even then, not ordinarily granted until years into a series' run, not as early as Season 2). A seasoned industry worker who himself had once been a showrunner and producer, and a veteran of alpha-male power-plays by white-male industry executives in big-budget movies such as Black's *The Last Boy Scout* (as discussed in Chapter 4), Wayans no doubt calculated that he did not hold the upper hand in this dangerous occupational environment, so I suspect that he orchestrated the leaking through social media of Crawford's criminal behavior to the industry gossip blogs, as a political tactic to keep his workplace safe. As part of the series' eventual renewal by Fox, Crawford was subsequently fired and replaced by comic cinema actor Sean William Scott whom the network said will play a totally new character, with the mentally ill Martin Riggs whom I have enjoyed watching for so many decades (despite his record of being acted by literally “lethal” white-male performers with known anger-management issues) likely killed off by the start of Season 3.

While I support the firing of Crawford—workplace abuse being inexcusable—I was disappointed by the way that the network and showrunner did not simply place Scott into the Riggs role or recast Riggs using another actor. TV shows often perform subtle but significant mini-reboots of characters between seasons, even between the late-fall break and spring resumption of full-order series, such as when the showrunners of the now-defunct

sitcom *Kevin Can Wait* (CBS, 2016-2018) killed off the protagonist's wife in the interim between Seasons 1 and 2 then replaced her with the show's girlfriend character, Leah Remini, in order to garner higher ratings—just because the latter performer had acted with the star, Kevin James, in *The King of Queens*, an earlier, long-running comedy, a familiar romantic dynamic the producers suddenly decided would work better than the married-couple premise they had originally set up for Season 1.³ This Riggs replacement incident reminds me that teleplay writers must build a fictional world for media companies that ultimately do not prioritize story quality so much as responding to these workplace crises fearfully then moving on mechanically and reactively in order to protect corporate profits. I feel that Riggs as a character has done nothing wrong, as he is a piece of fiction, one of the few in action TV that incorporates the impact of mental illness into a protagonist, depicting that character's depressive or suicidal tendencies, something generally not done outside of experimental animated shows (*Bojack Horseman*), feminist dramedies (*Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*), arty cable comedies (*You're the Worst*), or exploitative teen dramas (*13 Reasons Why*). And that when push comes to shove, TV executives value ratings, advertisers, and surface production logistics, not narrative. A writer's genre-mixing skills might thus be put towards justifying all kinds of random structural, formal, and thematic shifts in the ongoing TV story, rather than towards meaningful innovation.

The second event that made me reflect upon how fantastic-genre teleplay writers face critical stakes of community expression in this Peak TV age was ABC's firing of the executive producer and star of its rebooted surprise-hit sitcom *Roseanne* (1988-1997 and 2018). By initially canceling the whole show, the network effectively laid off eponymous headliner Roseanne Barr, a libertarian who supports President Donald Trump, after she made racist comments on Twitter about former Obama aide Valerie Jarrett, an African American whom Barr derided by implying that Jarrett was the biological result of "Planet of the Apes" crossed with the "Muslim Brotherhood." In addition to Barr being immediately dropped by her talent agency and fired by the network, as well as (rightfully) excoriated for her anti-black racism and Islamophobia in the blogosphere, ABC's first reaction had been to cancel the beloved show, opening the door for other networks that had been running *Roseanne* reruns from the 1980s through 1990s to stop broadcasting them as well. This is another example of corporate media only looking to repair their short-term image with advertisers and their branding with diverse viewers (i.e., ratings), reacting bureaucratically

and fearfully rather than considering the nature of its role within the symbolic production of televisual diversity and in responsible creative-labor management. The writers, performers, and other union members earning residuals for the reruns and drawing salaries and wages on the reboot lost their royalties and jobs—in addition to scripted TV landscape being bereaved of one of the rare Peak television shows that realistically and non-patronizingly portrayed working-class white people in a mainstream narrative format.

Though the activist in me experienced anger at this unnecessarily punitive decision, the scholar felt vindicated—as the lack of truly thoughtful scripted series that depict working- and lower-class communities in empowering, accurate ways was after all the theme of Chapter 1—when media journalists, progressive bloggers, and network CEOs tried to come up with a list of current scripted series that similarly illustrated this demographic as respectfully and precisely, and consistently came up with the same two or three series out of the current, 500-show marketplace. These media professionals almost all mentioned the sitcom *Speechless* (ABC, 2016-present), which is technically about a lower-middle-class family from the Bronx with a disabled child who all move into an upper-middle-class neighborhood; *Last Man Standing* (ABC, 2011-2017; Fox 2018) which is about a middle-class white family but which displays conservative ideological characteristics and thus is assumed to appeal to Trumpian white-working-class demographics; and occasionally *Shameless*, which as I said in Chapter 1 stereotypically focalizes the allegedly criminal, deviant, and pathological dimensions of poor people’s cultural behaviors towards comic ends, without an accompanying sense of real agency. In discussing working-class TV, these same media writers and industry executives overlooked the excellent people-of-color or women-produced shows (the three abovementioned, better-known series of course being created and showrun by white men) such as the dramedy *SMILF* (Showtime, 2017-present), created by comedienne Frankie Shaw, on a smart working-class Irish single mom who struggles to balance her gigs as a tutor to a crazy rich family’s children with her acting work, or *The Chi* (Showtime, 2018-present), about various men and boys interacting in the South Side of Chicago, which is the same social environment as that shown in *Shameless* but which balances compassionate feminist views of these male characters by black lesbian showrunner Lena Waithe with her unflinching critiques of the men’s masculine actions of violence and sexism.

In an astoundingly superficial response to the *Roseanne* cancelation, Fox took ABC’s defunct *Last Man Standing* and ordered a new broadcast season, its executives stating that in

the wake of *Roseanne*'s demise, the network realized how much it cared about working-class (white) people and thus chose to revive the (frankly mediocre and ideologically much more conservative than *Roseanne*) series. When the rebooted *Roseanne* had originally proved a hit earlier that season, ABC-Disney executives also made all kinds of statements to the entertainment-industry press about realizing that working-class viewers had been significant and underlooked and how they were now dedicated to representing that demographic; however, by yanking the whole show—not just Barr—from the ABC fall lineup, their actions contradicted these statements. My husband and I were loving the reboot, which, like the original series, proved one of the few prime-time shows where protagonists visibly and diegetically were made to struggle economically in very contemporary ways, with protagonist Roseanne Conner now disabled by an elderly knee condition and consequently addicted to opioids due to her inability to afford the “elective” surgery that her insurance deemed not essential to her lifestyle, while she is forced financially to work an irregular Uber-driving job to supplement contractor husband Dan's dwindling income, and while the couple had no choice but to let unemployed single-mom daughter Darlene and her tween/teenage children live with them, as Dan painfully contemplated hiring LatinX illegal immigrant labor which was cheaper than rehiring his best friend, a working-class African American whom he would have to pay at union rates. With such a thematically substantial and well-watched show bringing meaningful content to Trumpland, I did not understand why ABC simply could not recast the lead Roseanne role or write her out of the story world then replace her with another character/s.

As I analyzed creative-worker responses to ABC's reactive actions, two stood out as reflective of my (clearly) minority viewpoint as a critical media scholar. The first smart response was by risqué comedienne and feminist actress Kathy Griffin, herself the victim of an extended over-reaction by media-industry employment gatekeepers and opinion-shaping popular-culture bloggers when in 2017 she posed comically with a fake-bloodied head of Donald Trump in a video she posted on her Twitter and Instagram accounts. The following media outrage by conservatives and by embarrassed (and sexist) industry liberals effectively got Griffin fired from her prominent New Year's Eve gig for CNN in cohosting the widely televised broadcast dropping of the ball with Anderson Cooper, her comedy concert appearances canceled, and Griffin herself hounded as a potential terrorist by various

national-security organizations. Griffin's astute tweets about the *Roseanne* cancelation and ABC's actions included these following insights:

- Not lost on me that I can't get a TV gig or special, despite selling out shows in major venues across the country, because of a pic with a mask and ketchup, and that Roseanne got a network show despite tweeting insane and racist conspiracy theories that she actually believed...
- The reality is, ABC, like anyone with the ability to see, hear, and read, knew who Roseanne was when they gave her this show. They wanted to get a piece of Trump/conservative world business. So I'm not going to heap praise on (Disney CEO) Bob Iger or anyone else at the network...
- I call these men (network CEOs) the check writers. It doesn't matter how many women/POC (people of color) executives you have under them, as long as the check writers all remain older white men you're going to continue to have ridiculous programming decisions...

The first comment, to me, reflects the comic's use of genre definition to draw a political distinction between the two women's high-profile social-media tweets. As a satirist, Griffin had been using comedic exaggeration, a fantasy practice, to express her feelings about Trump towards her comedy fans and liberals in social media, but she emphasizes that Roseanne's usually funny thoughts, in contrast, were articulated in a way meant to be taken seriously, literally, and realistically by her racist and sexist conservative followers and thus constituted a dangerously delusional, possibly harmful, practice. Moreover, Griffin underscores that everyone in the blogosphere had known about Barr's racist right-wing conspiracy theories since she constantly expressed them on social media years before her hiring by ABC, and that the network leadership's suddenly "moral" reaction made no sense except in the framework of saving its brand and profitability.

Griffin's analysis goes against the reactions of many ABC-employed performers, writers, and showrunners such as Vernoff who praised their network on social media for foregoing the potential ad revenues which the #1 hit show might have generated in Season 2, which initial industry estimates had pegged at around \$45-60 million. However, critical industry analyses by *Deadline* and other fact-centered, political-economically precise entertainment journals noted that it was Carsey-Werner Productions, not ABC-Disney, that in fact owned *Roseanne* and most profited from the midseason replacement's short run, and

that while the show was able to set high advertising rates, it also was the fourth most expensive broadcast comedy to produce, and many large advertisers had been holding back on purchasing commercials for their clients, carefully monitoring the famously impulsive, controversial star's Twitter and other social media posts, before recommending ads. *Deadline* cites media researchers specializing in the advertising industry who said that, even before the star's infamous tweet, many major corporations were holding back on purchasing *Roseanne* ads because they did not want to alienate their wide customer bases (Hayes). Most interesting to me was Shonda Rhimes' series of tweets which reflected her ambivalence about her longtime network's response. On the one hand, she thanked the African American president of ABC Channing Dungey—the first black woman to head a major broadcast TV network as well as to serve as ABC's leader—who made the decision to cancel *Roseanne*, hashtagging #justice with her statement of gratitude; however, in the very same minute, she also hashtagged #notjustice in a separate tweet, saying, "The terrible part is all of the talented innocent people who worked on that show now suffer because of this," before admitting "... (H)onestly she (Barr) got what she deserved," a few minutes later, ending that post with "Roseanne made a choice. A racist one. ABC made a choice. A human one." Rhimes' whiplash-inducing series of mixed reactions on social media mirrors my own ambivalence. The last part, emphasizing ABC's humanity, to me felt like subtle shade, criticism layered behind praise so as to seem not to attack one of the few black female executives to reach that level of authority in television's broadcast sector. I feel that Rhimes knew that the cancellation of this representationally complex show would prove harmful, a hit to the much-needed but substantially lacking critical discourse about working-class US families in scripted TV, in addition to hurting so many creative workers unnecessarily. Perhaps this was because Rhimes, like Barr, had originally navigated her way into power and wealth as a feminist writer aware of the larger pop-cultural landscape and the different types of ideological change work it required. Of course, in the end, ABC partially reversed its position in the weeks following these initial social-media responses, opting to once more change the canceled show's status into a new sitcom named *The Conners*, a series focusing on that same fictional family without their matriarch, basically *Roseanne* without Roseanne.

These two major media events direct me to reframe teleplay writers within recent debates over the convergence culture discourse in creative-media studies. Media convergence debates focus on the controversy around whether the digital mass-communication

technologies of the millennium facilitate public education and social justice or marginalize and exploit working-class and poor populations already threatened by the global advance of neoliberalism and its stratifying political-economic policies. The convergence-culture discourse divides liberal, libertarian, and conservative researchers, who generally value the work of leading proponent Henry Jenkins, from media scholars working in Marxist, cultural studies, and critical theory traditions, who view Jenkins's analyses as dangerously naïve. Such media studies debates pit Jenkins's notion of convergence culture against critical media scholars' emphases on communicative capitalism.

In Jenkins's Habermasian ideal, twenty-first-century citizens' increased media activity affords them optimal expressive agency via membership in "knowledge communities." These communities (such as fan or advocacy organizations, networks of protest, loyal consumers, racial-ethnic groups) are propelled by members' "collective intelligence," which serves as a counter-balancing force against the institutional power of complex organizations. The result is a modern "participatory culture" of heightened public expression, fueled by information-sharing systems that expedite extensively distributive, highly interactive connections, especially "Web 2.0"-type platforms driven by "user-generated content" including social media sites, "smart" technologies, Internet sites/blogs/videos, mobile device applications (2006). For example, when Barr sent out that abhorrent tweet, educated and humanistic TV viewers, especially African Americans, "participated" in social media to respond critically, and when she defended herself vigorously, they combined their collective knowledge to argue against her claims, further expressing their outrage and displeasure with her ignorance, especially by praising ABC for its decisive action. This reinforced the network's assumptions that as consumers, millions of viewers would not buy products advertised on the network during her show, so it had done the right thing for its shareholders and advertisers.

Jenkins sees this paradigmatic shift in communications as enabled by a transformation in material forces, from a distribution-centered, top-down model, where people were passive vis-à-vis transnational conglomerates and nation-states, to a "spreadable" (2013, 3) or "hybrid" model emphasizing content circulation, "where a mix of top-down and bottom-up forces determine how material is shared across and among cultures in far more participatory (and messier) ways" (1–2). Global firms thus must factor into their decision making the increasingly knowledgeable, vociferous, and tactical

participation of ordinary people within the marketplace. For instance, “citizen journalists,” he illustrates, employ video/blog/mobile posts or feeds toward critical or counter-hegemonic witnessing/testimony/declaration in the public sphere if they are unhappy with a company’s products or actions (2007). Thus, the leaking of the behind-the-scenes workplace information and viral video testifying to Crawford’s abusive on-set behavior to industry gossip blogs, possibly by Wayans or another of his *Lethal Weapon* crew members/coworkers, constitutes an example of such citizenship journalism, especially if Fox executives in charge had not been addressing the issue—meaning these posts stimulated the corporate decisionmakers to fire Crawford. These media-expressive practices by average and/or anonymous workers can be seen as an example of “spreadable” content distribution, bottom-up media communication rather than top-down.

On the other hand, detractors of Jenkins and the convergence-culture thesis point to community members’ false consciousness in the de-valuing of their own (and others’) labor. Proponents of oppositional perspectives believe that Big Media socializes people to attribute the informational *power* of convergence mainly to “innovative” global capitalism (e.g., corporations such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube), which has progressively monopolized the tools of communication, rather than to acknowledge expressive contributions of workers and consumers. These groups collectively forge information and knowledge into valuable commodities (in this case, not only screenwriters crafting audiovisual stories/storyworlds, but also authors of online blogs, video essays, social media posts, etc.) that multinational corporations ultimately own and sell at great profit. Disturbed by ordinary people’s susceptibility to “communicative capitalism,” a term developed by critical media scholar Jodi Dean (2005), this perspective notes economic and other barriers to civic engagement, community expression, and progressive social change in the digital era (Kubitschko 2012). When the channels of communication become dominated by capital with only the profit motive setting informational limits, political opinion can be rapidly manipulated on a mass scale, ignorance efficiently multiplied without checks and balances necessary to maintain a healthy public culture. For instance, I was surprised to see how quickly most media news outlets had repeated the assumption that in cancelling *Roseanne*, ABC-Disney was making a grand sacrificial gesture at foregoing huge ad revenues, when in fact thus far, it had seen relatively little direct profit from the short-lived series, and when its predictions for future ad revenues might not have borne out anyway, as large corporations

had been delaying purchasing ads related to the series out of concern that precisely this kind of Barr-instigated news event might arise. To me, this pattern demonstrates how quickly “digital-democratic” media discourse can converge into a singular political agreement without evidence or critical thinking: e.g., the commonly expressed agreement that “ABC-Disney is such a noble, non-racist brand, committed to equality and justice to the point that it even values democracy more than money.” Communicative capitalism is “the commonplace idea that the market, today, is the site of democratic aspirations” (Dean 54). It tricks citizens into believing that the volume of information surfacing in new communication venues generates real institutional transformation, political resistance, and democratic outcomes. Although today’s citizens are densely interconnected and technologically organized, their ability to influence government policies remains limited by the unequal societal (expressive) power between themselves and Big Media conglomerates. A chilling example of how powerful and unanswerable media corporations are to the government is the swift impunity with which ABC-Disney’s cancellation effectively eliminated so many creative workers’ opportunities to earn salaries/wages, as well as other workers’ residuals from their past labor that they had relied upon since the 1980s-1990s, under the corporate-serving excuse that this was due to the thoughtless action of a single employee.

Often skeptical of the phrase “convergence culture,” this position contends that digital-era capitalist propaganda—circulated by the mainstream media’s “cybertarian chorus” (Maxwell and Miller 2011, 595) that sings pro-business ideologies of “technology fetishism” (Dean 2005, 51)—masks the sharply stratified global economy. Media conglomerates and their government allies own and control the very “means of communication” (Hebblewhite 2016, 213) during an era when capitalism’s accumulative reach extends toward knowledge itself. The trumpeting of convergence culture—“where old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways” (Jenkins 2006, 2)—underestimates the political-economic vulnerability of the general populace. They can use digital networks to amplify their voices, but they are rarely heard by political or corporate elites who still dictate the distribution of societal resources, including capital and the information and communications technology infrastructure. This perspective would caution that working screenwriters, performers, and other creative-industry labor who speak out against sexual harassment, abusive workplace conditions, sudden layoffs, and other

injustices, might be taking real risks, because power and money still matter. Until we change top-level corporate leadership (Griffin's "check-writers") and their management practices, *de facto* institutional policies, and laws that we commit to enforcing systematically, we cannot rely merely upon digital technology and other networked twenty-first-century ICTs in and of themselves to secure the work of social change and community empowerment. Finally, the latter position urges scholars to research anti-hegemonic, "alternative media" practices rather than accept that millennial communication platforms automatically empower citizens (Fuchs 2012, 392–394). Critical media scholars must reject grand pronouncements of participatory culture and instead ground their work in historically and geographically specific patterns of "audience commodification," the corporate extraction of profit from people's participation in mass-informational systems (Fuchs 2016, 536–548). Researchers should explore theoretical developments that recast citizens' so-called "participation" in (and "interactivity" with) ICT platforms within the larger framework of media ownership and control: unequal production relations; uneven distribution systems; and globalized divisions of labor. Towards this end, I have committed my scholarship to unearthing (mostly) unacknowledged screenwriters and screen writers from the multitude who have labored collaboratively to use fantastic-genre modes in scripting the field of cultural production known as twenty-first century television.

Creative Writing Programming and the 10 Battles for Industrial Innovation

A few weeks from now, I will graduate with a degree in English and a specialty in creative writing from a program that, by and large, does not teach audiovisual narrative genres of creative storytelling. This puzzles me to no end, as most cultural and literary studies faculty and other specialists in the same Department offer television, film, videogame, graphic novel, online video, mobile app, and other audiovisual texts up for analyses in their class assignments and required readings. There is a serious gap here, one that convergence-culture scholars might call a participation gap or that critical theorists of media convergence would call a gap in the agency (/ability) to perform alternative-media expression. In its first 40 years, creative writing as a discipline evolved as an academic experiment to approach literary studies via writing practice, in contrast to conventional analyses based on linguistic or historical methodologies, according to historian David Gershon Myers (2006). From the 1880s through the 1940s, universities tested early creative

writing classes and nascent programs that, for the first time, began to treat literature “as if it were a continuous experience and not a mere corpus of knowledge—as if it were a living thing, as if people intended to write more of it” (ibid. 4). The postwar era subsequently institutionalized the field rapidly, with the creative writing program becoming a major channel through which universities expanded to engage local communities and prove that academia could provide more democratic access to build citizens’ knowledge and skills during the competitive era of the US-USSR space race (ibid. 5). Programs started to serve the needs of the baby-boomer generation, expanding the study of literature to its meaningful ongoing praxis as novelists, poets, and other published writers became a regular faculty of English Departments and MFA programs and engaged students who wanted to produce literature themselves. As such, creative writing transformed the subdiscipline of literature by being “both an achievement and a promise, and inheritance of texts and a flexible set of methods and standards for generating new texts” (4).

What does such theorizing of the institutional history of creative writing imply for creative-media studies of screenwriters in the digital era? First, programmatically speaking, without CW classes in authoring audiovisual media, our English Department is only teaching students to analyze TV/film (etc.) texts intellectually, not produce them as an affective, spiritual, community practice of genre. Students love mass-media-generated popular culture, especially millennials who grow up with it stitched across their brains due to social technology. What does it mean that Hawai‘i public-university students are not formally trained to create such texts and at the most merely comment upon—or at the least, simply consume—them? This fits in perfectly with corporate media’s longtime gatekeeping agenda of limiting screenwriters to a very narrow, monolithic demographic with which companies’ executive leadership is quite familiar culturally and thus can control as an elite labor force appealing to their auteurist narcissism, fear, and solipsism. Second, in terms of employment, corporate media in this era requires what development executives and brand managers call “content providers,” writers and artists whom they will pay for creating narrative and other kinds of art to cross-mediate over multiple ICTs so that corporations can appear to engage consumers and fans with a friendly, memorable, personable brand. For screenwriters at the higher-status end of such millennial immaterial labor, salaries average in the low six figures, once a decent track record has been established (as I cited in Chapter 2). Even though the lower end includes media bloggers, social-media targeting posters, would-be influencers,

video bloggers, and others whose largely participatory labor is exploited and often underpaid, why wouldn't a creative-writing program of a state's flagship university at least teach the highest-remunerated creative-writing genre among these types of labor, screenwriting? This is an era where the next generation's most talented creative writers are no longer applying to MFA programs to master print-literary forms, but rather entering film and TV production programs to earn MFAs in screenwriting: it is widely known among those of us in production studies that these bright young writers now wish to write the great American screenplay, not the great American novel. This collective desire started in the 1980s and 1990s due to Black and Eszterhas's very public breaking of the glass ceiling for scriptwriters' salaries, but now has become institutionalized in US continental universities where more and more English, humanities, and multidisciplinary programs offer courses in the creative writing of audiovisual stories. Moreover, for traditional pre-digital-era creative-writing programs, Myers evaluates that "Estimates peg the professional success rate for graduates in creative writing at about one percent (as compared with 90 percent for graduates of medical school)" (2)—an outcome that's frankly unacceptable to most writers from communities of color, indigenous communities, women, and others who already suffer from economic injustice and job inequality. My best screenwriting students have been not English majors but African American, Arab American, Asian American, and Native Hawaiian learners majoring in other fields who desperately desire to write creatively because they have long lived inside of TV and movies and comics and videogames, but who want to be responsible to their families and support them someday. Third, wouldn't it be interesting to build a multidisciplinary, cross media, indigenous-community-engaged creative writing program that marries traditional practitioners and cultural artists as faculty alongside faculty peer practitioners and researchers of digital ICTs and their commercial narrative forms—including audiovisual and participatory forms—to develop and institutionalize diverse "alternative media" expression from Hawaiian, Pacific, and Asian populations? South Korea's current industrial policy towards popular-culture exports including music, fashion, TV/film and cosmetics might be a touchstone, but indigenous communities on the US continent already engaged in anticolonial gaming and other creative survivance labor could be another direction to explore.

Regardless, industrial innovation for the twenty-first century scriptwriter necessitates, as African American author and activist Ishmael Reed would say, writin' as fightin'. At the

ending roundtable discussion of my Department's "Creating Futures Rooted in Wonder" symposium on the connections between science fiction, fairy tale, and indigenous studies, where scholarship intersected with community knowledge and practice, I offered this list of political battles for which industrial writers of audiovisual fantasy and science fiction narratives must prepare individually on their way to collective struggle, updated here for the conclusion of this dissertation.

BATTLE THE FIRST: Ownership and control of media, a fight over institutionalized access to powerful storytelling opportunities. Paraphrasing sometime science-fiction novelist John Ridley, creator of acclaimed TV series, *American Crime*, and the Academy-Award-winning screenwriter of historical drama, *12 Years a Slave*: Do you "own your shit"? Do you control rights to it, in different ICT platforms such as online videos, "streaming" television, device-based "apps," or broadcast and cable formats?

BATTLE THE SECOND: Workplace narrative autonomy, a fight over managerial practices that might censor, or lessen, the quality of artists' story ideas. What degree of freedom of speech have you surrendered to your studio bosses, corporate financiers, or other funders? Like global filmmaker and sometime sf-horror TV director Lee Tamahori in his early "indigenous film" years, do you benefit from a professional support network—i.e. the Maori film commission organized by the late, great producer Merata Mita—to help you hold strong to your artistic vision through the tough financing process?

BATTLE THE THIRD: Profits/proceeds/"back-ends," a fight over sharing the money that artists' sold—or re-sold—Intellectual Property will yield in diverse markets and media. Like former A-list scripter Joe Eszterhas, who demanded in his contracts that he earn a first-dollar percentage of his movies' box office sales, do you pursue your IP royalties beyond the union minimum?

BATTLE THE FOURTH: Spin, a fight over brand, status, and reputation management by both artists and corporations, within a hyper-mediated, virally meme-ing, news world. Like ABC-Netflix power-showrunner Shonda Rhimes, who utilizes Twitter and other social media to build her brand as well as advance the anti-harassment #TimesUp campaign, do you import community messages into corporate television content?

BATTLE THE FIFTH: Reality, a fight over representation and regionality in scripted genre tales, amidst our national cultural politics of authenticity. Whose lives might your stories affect deeply, and what'll you risk to prove you care about that community? Like

Nahnatchka Khan, creator of *Fresh Off the Boat*, do you base your work in part on documentary genres such as real-life memoir and utilize diverse writing labor among your scripting staff? Like Callie Khouri, whose *Nashville* producing and performing team made a point of setting down roots in the titular southern music town which effectively served as an additional protagonist in the series, will you engage the very communities that your episodes depict?

BATTLE THE SIXTH: Reproduction, a fight over a story's transformation during the distribution and exhibition stages, as it's revised by P&A (print and advertising) efforts that market it to new populations. Like Jennie Urman Snyder, whose new reboot of the witchy *Charmed* takes what had once been the longest-running television show with all-female leads into the twenty-first century with all women of color, do you take advantage of old genre structures to innovate fresh content?

BATTLE THE SEVENTH: Subversion, a fight over the symbolically meaningful transgression of form—including “new” genre mixes and mash-ups—and how these experiments can transform genre structure in politically (even economically!) significant ways. Like Kinjō Tetsuo, whose *Ultra 7* took the postwar Japanese SF TV and mashed it up with anti-war, anti-colonial themes, are you changing the stakes of genre through transgressive formal experimentation?

BATTLE THE EIGHTH: Evaluation, a fight over criticism and counting, such as how industry awards, strong reviews, and relatively good sales/ratings/box office, may heighten a story's exchange value. Like Oscar winner John Logan, who at the height of his prestige, brought the strongly anti-imperial *Penny Dreadful* to TV, are you taking advantage of your privilege and status to use televisual narrative as a creative criticism against colonial forms?

BATTLE THE NINTH: Impact/re-mediation, a fight over audience and participant reception to a televisual story and the real-world effects of its regionalized, racialized, classed, and gendered interpretation. Like Eddie Huang, will you contextualize TV shows that have carelessly extracted profit from cultural communities, by shining a light upon their grievous errors and erasures of real people?

BATTLE THE TENTH: Body, a fight over the artist's physical, spiritual, and cultural health, as the other battles exact a personal toll. To what self-care will you commit, to ensure long enjoyment of your art, for you but also for your family and community? Like

John Kneubuhl, who at the peak of his Hollywood teleplay writing, quit to return to his ancestral home and write culturally meaningful stories for his countrymen, are you honoring your spirit by working under the best labor conditions, on the most meaningful writing projects possible? Like Krista Vernoff, would you use your body and its life stories to testify towards safer workplaces and less industry abuse? For stories—in their production as well as their consumption, whether oral, print-literary, or corporate mass-medial—should always nourish and heal.

May your fights be energizing, educational, and empowering as mine.

Notes

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1. See Noxon for an account of Lyle's experiences.
2. See Andreeva for a summary of *Lethal Weapon*'s on-set troubles.
3. See Bradley for a feminist media journalist's response to this "all female characters are interchangeable" move by CBS executives.

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